Edward F. Pancoast

from —

Maggie —

Christmas 1896.

EDWARD F. PANCOAST.

THE

MYSTERY

OF

LOST RIVER CANYON

BY

HARRY CASTLEMON, pseud.

AUTHOR OF "ROCKY MOUNTAIN SERIES," "GUNBOAT SERIES," "BOY TRAPPER SERIES," ETC., ETC.

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THE

Mystery of Lost River Canyon.

PROLOGUE.

ONE hot, sultry August afternoon, a weary horse, whose heaving sides and foam-flecked breast bore evidence to the fact that he had been driven long and rapidly, was reined up in front of a little station on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. His rider—a tall, broad-shouldered, full-bearded man—was dressed in clothing which seems to have been chosen by the ranchmen of the country of which we write, as a badge distinctive of their calling—a red shirt, wide-brimmed hat, corduroy trousers and heavy top boots.

He was armed and equipped as the law of the plains directs—a heavy Winchester rifle

being slung at his back, and a brace of navy revolvers buckled about his waist.

Before his horse had fairly come to a standstill, he swung himself from the saddle, hurried into the telegraph office, drew a couple of blanks toward him, and, after writing a hasty dispatch upon each, handed them to the operator.

The latter read them with great deliberation, counted the words they contained, and no one would have imagined, by looking at his impassive face, that he had made himself master of a piece of news that was destined to work the most remarkable changes in the lives of some of the characters who are to appear in our story.

Having received pay for the dispatches, the operator seated himself at his instrument and sent them off, while the horseman sprang into his saddle and rode slowly away.

Let us go with these telegrams and see where they went, and how they were received by those to whom they were addressed. They both sped over the same wire until they reached the city of Chicago, and then one

turned off and made its way to the little town of Bolton, in Indiana, where we will leave it for the present, while we follow the other, which finally reached its journey's end in a thriving village in one of our Eastern States.

The operator at the latter place, when he heard his "call" sounded, seated himself at his table with his usual nonchalance; but, before he had written half a dozen words, a surprised and grieved expression settled on his face, and, when the dispatch had been copied, he leaned back in his chair and sighed deeply.

"By George!" he exclaimed aloud.

"What's the matter?" asked a messenger boy, who stood at his elbow.

"That's telling," was the answer. "If you are ever able to run a ticker of your own, you will know that it is against the law to reveal the contents of the messages you receive. Take this up to Mrs. Butler's, and be quick about it. It is for Bob Howard—all the way from Arizona."

"By George!" repeated the operator, when the messenger boy was out of hearing. "It's

too bad. It will pretty near kill Bob—and this is his last day at school, and he is going to start for the West to-morrow morning. He'll go to a desolate home, poor fellow! If I had the money he is heir to, I wouldn't spend many more hours at this table, I bet you!"

The messenger boy broke into a run as soon as he was out of the office, and presently mounted the steps leading to the door of a modest house in a quiet street.

His pull at the bell was answered by a motherly-looking old lady, who took the message, signed her own name to the receipt book, because she didn't believe that Mr. Howard had yet come from the academy, and then went up-stairs and laid the dispatch upon the centre-table in a nicely furnished room, propping it up against a book, so that it would be sure to meet the eye of the person for whom it was intended as soon as he entered at the door.

He came a few minutes later—a tall, dark youth, with coal-black hair and eyes, and a countenance so striking, that, when you had

taken one look at it, you always wanted to turn and take another. You knew that he was a young gentleman as soon as you put your eyes on him.

He was a favorite with the girls because of his handsome face and figure; with his teachers, because of his studious habits and strict regard for the rules of school; and with his fellows, because of his kindness of heart and his proficiency in every athletic sport.

Frail as he looked, he took the lead of them all. No academy boy had ever taken his measure on the campus, and as for sparring and fencing, his superiority was acknowledged by everybody. He was a good oarsman, a lightning pitcher, a terrific batter, and dead sure of making a double shot on quails or snipe as often as the opportunity was offered. Many a poor student had his money helped out of a tight place; and, although Bob never let one hand know what the other hand did, those who were the recipients of his favors could always tell where they came from.

The companion who followed at his heels was a different sort of boy altogether. He was short and thick-set, and as homely as he was good-natured, and his whole appearance indicated that he had not been born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

His name was George Edwards, and he was janitor of the academy. His lot had always been a hard one—how hard you will see as our story progresses—and George could not remember the time when he had not been dependent upon his own exertions for his daily bread.

Up to the hour he made the acquaintance of Bob Howard, his life had been one fierce and constant struggle with poverty; but, since that memorable afternoon, his pathway had been made smoother for him.

Having introduced our heroes, whom we hope you will like, we will describe the circumstances under which they first met, and then we will go back to the telegrams, which bear an important part in our story.

CHAPTER I.

GEORGE AND HIS UNCLE.

"WELL, George, it is either that or the poorhouse."

"There's where I differ with you, Uncle Ruben."

"You are an ungrateful scamp. Here I am, offerin' you a good home—"

"I know you offer me shelter, food and clothing, but you can't give me a home. I shall never have one again, now that my mother is dead."

"And your father in prison for stealin'."

"You might have spared me that, Uncle Ruben. I know he is in prison, and there is no need that you and everybody else should constantly remind me of it. I am in no way to blame for what he did."

"Mebbe you hain't. But can't you see how it's a hurtin' of you? Who is there

about here that would be willin' to hire the son of a thief?"

"I don't care to talk to you now, Uncle Ruben. Leave me alone for a day or two, and then I will tell you what I have decided to do."

"Might as well decide now as any time. I reckon you know that this house an' everything what's into it belongs to me, don't you? I didn't say nothing to your mother about it when she was alive, 'cause she was my brother's wife, and I didn't want to pester her; but now—"

"I know you didn't say anything about the mortgage, but I notice that you always demanded the interest the moment it was due. You took it, too, when you knew that my mother didn't have money enough in the house to buy a sack of flour."

"Well, it was my due, an' I wanted it."

George Edwards uttered an exclamation of disgust, and, leaning his elbows on the railing that surrounded the porch, he rested his chin on his hands, and gazed off toward the distant hills; while Uncle Ruben paced

up and down in front of the house, thrashing his cowhide boots with his riding whip, and taking a survey of the buildings and grounds that were soon to come into his possession by virtue of the mortgage he held upon them.

He was a very mean man, this Ruben Edwards—the meanest man in all that country, so everybody said—and you would have known it the minute you looked at him. He loved money, and not unfrequently resorted to questionable means in order to get it.

He owned several farms in the neighborhood, and was now congratulating himself on having secured another. True, it was not much of an acquisition. All he saw, as he looked about him, were a few acres of stony, unproductive land, a small, unpainted dwelling-house, and a few out-buildings, all of which showed signs of decay, in spite of the efforts the industrious George had made to keep them in repair.

It was no wonder that George did not want to talk to his uncle on this particular morning. He did not believe that there was

a boy in the world who was so utterly miserable as he was, or who had so little to live for.

He had always been looked down on and shunned by the boys of his acquaintance on account of the conduct of his father, who was one of the village vagabonds; and, since the latter had been shut up in the penitentiary for breaking into a store and stealing money that he was too lazy to work for, poor George had had a hard time of it. No one in that village would have anything to do with him.

He left school and tried to find something to do in order to support his mother, who was an invalid; but nobody needed his services.

"There's work enough to be done," he often said to his mother, when he came home from his long tramps, weary and dusty; "but they won't give me a chance. They are all suspicious of me. But never mind; you shan't suffer. I have long been thinking of something; and, since no one will hire me, I shall go into business for myself."

And he did, just as soon as he could make the necessary arrangements.

The people who would not let him saw their wood, because they were afraid he would steal something, did not refuse to purchase the delicious trout and yellow perch that he peddled from door to door, and neither did the luscious berries he brought in from distant fields and pastures ever remain long on his hands.

He made money; but he often became disheartened, and angry, too, when he drew a contrast between his circumstances and those of the boys about him, and then all that was needed was a smile or a word of praise from his mother to bring all his courage and determination back to him again. But now she was gone—the only friend he ever had. She had been dead just a week, and George was lonely, indeed.

He wanted to get out into the woods by himself, and stay there, and he was already making preparations to take a final leave of the house which he could no longer call his home, when he saw his Uncle Ruben's old

clay-bank pacer coming down the road, and Uncle Ruben himself in the saddle.

George was not at all pleased to see him, for he knew pretty nearly what the man would have to say to him.

"'Taint no great shakes of a place," said Uncle Ruben, after running his eye over the house and its surroundings. "But mebbe I can sell it for enough to save myself. Then you won't go home with me an' work for your board and clothes?"

"No, I won't," replied George promptly.

He did not thank his relative for his offer, for he knew the object he had in making it.

George was very strong for a boy of his age, and fully capable of doing a man's work in the field; and he knew that his services there would be worth much more than his board and clothes. So did Uncle Ruben; but the latter thought it would be a good thing if he could induce his nephew to agree to his proposition, for it would be a saving to him of twenty or thirty dollars a month.

"If you will stay with me till you are twenty-one years old, I will give you a yoke

of oxen an' a good suit of clothes to begin life with," added Uncle Ruben. "That's customary, you know."

"I know it is," answered George. "But if I live to see the age of twenty-one, I shall have more than a yoke of worthless old oxen and a suit of shoddy clothes, *I* tell you!"

Uncle Ruben winced a little at this.

"I saw the outfit you gave to one of your bound boys, who had served you faithfully for six long years," continued George. "The oxen were not worth the powder to blow them up, and the clothes fell to pieces in less than a month. You can't palm any of your old trash off on me. I can do better."

"I don't see how. Whose goin' to hire you?"

"I don't ask any one to hire me. I've got a business of my own that enabled me to support my mother, and to pay your interest on the very day it became due."

"But you shan't foller it no longer," said Uncle Ruben, decidedly. "Boys like you don't know what's best for themselves. You

need a guardeen, an' I shall ask the selectmen to have you bound out to me until you are of age."

"I don't care if you do," replied George, in a voice choked with indignation. "Having no property, I do not need a guardian, and I won't have one, either. I can take care of myself."

"I know what you want to do," said Uncle Ruben, with a sneer. "You're too scandalous lazy to work for a livin', an' you want to go back to that shanty of yours in the woods, an' live there, trappin' and fishin', jest for all the world like a wild Injun. But that ain't a respectable way to live—that way ain't—an' I shan't consent to it."

"I haven't asked your consent. I have a right to make an honest living in any way I can, and I intend to exercise that right. I am not too lazy to work; but, as you say, there is no one about here who will give me anything to do. I am not going to starve and go ragged, however, for all that."

"Be you goin' to stay up there in the woods all your life?" inquired Uncle Ruben.

"No, I am not. I want to be something better than a hermit. I intend to stay up there until I can save money enough to take me to some place where I am not known, and then I shall make a new start."

"Well, we'll wait until we hear what the selectmen have to say about that," answered Uncle Ruben, with a grin and a wink which seemed to indicate that he felt sure of his ground. "Mebbe they'll think, as I do, that it's best for you to go with me, so that you can have somebody what knows something to take care on you. You can stay here till I can have time to go an' see 'em."

"I don't care to stay in this house another night," replied George, quickly. "I was getting ready to leave it when I saw you coming. If you have got through talking, I'll go now."

So saying, George disappeared through the open door, and, when he came out again, he carried over his shoulder a heavy bundle, at which Uncle Ruben gazed with suspicion.

"Everything in here belongs to me, and was purchased with money that I earned

myself," said the boy, who understood the look. "If you don't believe it—"

Here George threw the bundle down upon the porch within reach of his uncle's hand.

But the latter did not offer to touch it. Mean as he was known to be, and anxious as he was to secure every article about the house that would clear him a dime or two at public auction, he could not bring himself to make an examination of his nephew's bundle.

"Well, then," said the latter, once more raising his property to his shoulder, "I will bid you good-by."

He hurried out of the yard, and up the road toward the hills, while Uncle Ruben stood in front of the porch and shook his riding-whip at him.

"That's a powerful bad boy," said he to himself, "an' he's goin' to be a no-account vagabond, like his father was. But there's a heap of strength in him, an' it's a great pity that he should waste it by foolin' about in the woods, instead of puttin' it on my farm, where it would do some good. He'd oughter be taken in hand, that boy ought."

Uncle Ruben gave emphasis to this thought by hitting his boots a vicious cut with his whip, and then he went into the house, to see what he could find there.

CHAPTER II.

UNCLE RUBEN LEARNS SOMETHING.

WHILE Uncle Ruben was wandering about from one room to another, taking a mental inventory of the different articles they contained, and trying to figure up how much ready cash they ought to bring under the auctioneer's hammer, Jonathan Brown, who was one of the selectmen, stopped his horse in front of the bars, and hailed the house.

"Mornin', neighbor Edwards," he exclaimed, as Uncle Ruben appeared at the door. "'Pears to me you look sorter blue, don't you?"

"I'm so blue it'll rub off," replied Uncle Ruben, as he walked out to the fence and rested his arm on the top rail. "Silas cheated me fearful. I let him have too much money on that mortgage, an' I shan't get it

back into a good many dollars. Then there's that there boy, George—"

"Yes, I seen him a little while back," said Mr. Brown, facing about in his wagon and looking up the road in the direction in which George had disappeared. "He had a big bundle on his back, an' when I asked him if he had found work anywhere, he said he hadn't, an', what was more, he wasn't goin' to look for any. Where do you reckon he's goin'?"

"Up into the hills, to live like a wild Injun," replied Uncle Ruben, in a tone of disgust. "But I told him that that wasn't no respectable way to live, an' that I wouldn't never consent to it."

"I wouldn't, neither," said Mr. Brown.

"I offered to give him a good home, an' all he could eat and wear, if he would work for me till he was twenty-one; an' do you s'pose he would do it? No, he wouldn't," continued Uncle Ruben. "He jest as good as told me that he didn't ask no odds of me nor anybody else. Now, Jonathan, don't you think that, seein' as how I shall lose twenty-

five, and mebbe fifty dollars of the money I loaned my brother Silas on this property—don't you r'ally think that that there boy had oughter make it up to me? Couldn't I force him to do it?"

Mr. Brown scratched his head vigorously, and assumed an air of profound wisdom as he replied:

"I disremember jest now what the law has to say on that p'int; but I'll look it up."

"An' don't you think, Jonathan, that the boy was a fool to refuse a good home when I offered it to him?"

"Well," replied Mr. Brown, slowly, "to be honest with you, Ruben, I don't know who was the biggest fool—you or George."

"I know what you mean by them words, Jonathan, but I don't take no offense at 'em. I know that there ain't no other man about here who would be willin' to take him into his house; but somehow I couldn't forgit that he's my brother's son. He hain't got no livin' relations except me, as one may say—seein' that his mother is dead an' his father

locked up in prison—an' so I thought I had oughter do something for him."

"That shows your goodness of heart," said Mr. Brown, who was well enough acquainted with his friend Ruben to know that the latter never would have offered George a home under his roof if he had not believed that he could make something by it. "But it's my opinion that that there nephew of yourn will be shut up in prison, same as his father is, before many days more have passed over his head."

"Sho!" exclaimed Uncle Ruben, who was greatly astonished. "You don't tell me! What's he been a-doin' of?"

"I don't say that he's been a-doin' of anything," said Mr. Brown. "I'm only givin' you my opinion; an' it's the opinion of more'n one man in town, too. Now jest listen to me while I tell you. You know that there was a heap of stealin' goin' on about here a while back, don't you?"

Yes, Uncle Ruben knew all about it. He knew that burglaries had been of so frequent occurrence that the village merchants had

clubbed together and hired a couple of night watchmen to patrol the streets.

"Well," continued Mr. Brown, "you remember that while all them stores were bein' broke into an' robbed, our hen-roosts an' spring-houses didn't escape, don't you?"

Uncle Ruben remembered it perfectly, and he thought of it now with no little bitterness of heart.

He had missed more than one tub of butter from his spring-house, and nearly all his fine Plymouth Rock chickens had disappeared, and left no trace behind.

"All that was mighty curious, seein' that we couldn't find no track of the robbers; but something that happened arterward was still more curious. When George's mother was took sick, an' he had to stay to home an' look out for her, there wasn't no more steal-in' done. You remember that, too, don't you?"

Uncle Ruben fairly jumped from the ground, so great was the surprise occasioned by these words.

"You—you don't mean to say that George

had a hand in robbin' them stores an' hen-roosts, do you?" he asked, as soon as he had recovered the use of his tongue.

"I don't mean to say nothing," was Mr. Brown's reply. "I'm only jest a-tellin' of you."

"Well! *well!* That bangs me," said Uncle Ruben, looking reflectively at the ground. "I never thought that of George; but then—"

The speaker paused, but his silence spoke volumes. It was plain that the selectman understood what he meant by it, for he said, with some earnestness:

"That's jest what I thought, an' jest what I said. A boy whose father is a thief will bear watchin'. Now see here, Ruben. It's a mighty disagreeable thing to talk about, but I jest want to tell you. In less'n a week arter the doors of the prison closed behind your brother, George an' his mother began livin' on the fat of the land. Why, I have seen him in Chandler's store, more'n once, spendin' money for oranges an' lemons an' canned peaches—things that never come into

my house, 'cause I can't afford 'em—an I'd like to know where he got that money."

"He used to sell fish an' berries, you know," Uncle Ruben ventured to remark.

"Do you s'pose he made all his money in that way?" inquired Mr. Brown. "Don't you reckon he made more out of something else—butter an' chickens, for instance—an' that this fish an' berry business was jest a blind? I do; an' I ain't the only one who thinks so, neither. An' I'll tell you another thing. You can make up your mind to hear of stealin' an' plunderin' about this village before a week has passed away. Sich doin's wasn't never heard of till George built that shanty of his'n up there in the hills. There wasn't none of it goin' on while he was to home here, 'tendin' to his mother; but now that he has took to the woods, it'll begin ag'in. You wait an' see."

So saying, Mr. Brown touched his sleepy old horse with the long hickory switch which he always carried instead of a whip, and drove off, leaving Uncle Ruben to his meditations.

The latter did not look like a man whose

only nephew had just been accused of being a thief. He did not appear to be either sorry or vexed, and, in fact, he wasn't.

The expression of his countenance showed that he was surprised, and the sinister smile that lingered about his lips, and the gleeful way in which he rubbed his hands together, seemed to indicate that he was delighted, as well.

"Much obliged to you for your visit, Mr. Brown," said he, as he mounted the steps that led to the porch. "So George was the one that stole my Plymouth Rocks, an' cut up all them other shines, was he? I'm glad I found it out afore I spoke to the selectmen about havin' him bound out to me, for now I can save the cost of havin' the papers drawn up. I'll go home an' speak to Polly Ann, an' then I'll ride up to the lake an' have another talk with George. I guess he will listen to me this time."

Having made sure that all the doors and windows were securely fastened, Uncle Ruben mounted his horse and set out for home.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, the fast-walking clay-bank carried him through

an open gate and past the back door of a thrifty farmhouse.

On the porch stood his wife, who looked surprised, and gave a somewhat incoherent reply to his cheerful greeting.

On ordinary occasions, Uncle Ruben was not an agreeable person to have about the house. He was always sullen and morose, unless he had been fortunate in some way, and then he had a smile and a pleasant word for everybody.

"Your father is in luck to-day, Sally," said Mrs. Edwards, as she went into the kitchen to assist her daughter with the dinner that was ready to be served up. "I know when he has made a good trade as well as he knows it himself."

"Well, then," replied Sally, joyously, "he must give me money enough to buy one of them new hats I seen down in the village t'other day. I can tell him that much."

Having put the clay-bank in his stall and performed his ablutions at the horse-trough in the barn-yard, Uncle Ruben came in and announced that he was ready for dinner.

While he was seated at the table, he talked about almost every subject except the one that was uppermost in his mind—to tell the truth, he stood a little in awe of his wife, and dreaded the explosion which he knew would follow when he spoke of his nephew, and told of the arrangements he had decided to make with him—and it was not until he had got up from his chair and put on his hat that he said to her:

"By the way, Polly Ann, I guess you might as well do a little something t'wards fixin' up that bed in the garret, for I shall most likely bring a boy home with me to-night."

"Who is he?" demanded Mrs. Edwards, rather sharply.

Bound boys—and Uncle Ruben never had any other—were her pet aversion.

"George," said her husband.

"Not your nephew, George Edwards?" exclaimed Polly Ann, in shrill tones.

Uncle Ruben nodded, and moved nearer to the door.

"Well, if that don't beat anything I ever

heard of, I wouldn't say so. Ruben Elias Edwards, have you gone an' took leave of your seven senses? Don't you know—"

"Yes, I know all about it," interrupted Uncle Ruben. "I know that by bringin' him here I can save enough money durin' the next six years to buy you an' Sally all the nice dresses an' hats you want."

Sally's face grew radiant, but her mother was not deceived. She had listened to just such promises before, and knew how much they were worth. She settled back in her chair, with a determined look on her face, and Uncle Ruben, knowing what was coming, hastened to the barn to saddle his horse.

When he rode by the porch the storm was at its height. His wife was crying and scolding at an alarming rate, and her shrill tones rang in his ears long after he had passed through the gate.

"Women is curious things," said Uncle Ruben to himself, as he urged the clay-bank forward at his best pace. "I knowed Polly Ann would raise a harrycane when I told her about George; but, in course, I couldn't help

that. She'll do as I told her, all the same, 'cause I am the head boss in that house. When I once make up my mind to a thing, it has got to go through."

This was probably true, so far as his wife and daughter were concerned, for they were dependent upon him; but George wasn't, and when Uncle Ruben came to deal with that young gentleman, he found that he had undertaken more than he could accomplish.

CHAPTER III.

A SURPRISE.

"NO doubt, I ought to feel very grateful toward Uncle Ruben for the offer he has just made me, but I can't say that I do," soliloquized George Edwards, as he trudged along the dusty road, with his heavy bundle slung over his shoulder. "I am almost seventeen years old now, and I am getting too big to work for my board and clothes. I am not obliged to do it, for I can clear a dollar a day up here in the woods, and, as my living will not cost me anything to speak of, I can save enough money by next spring to take me so far away from this miserable place that I shall never hear of it again. I know I shall be very lonely, but I shall have peace and comfort, and be well out of the reach of Aunt Polly Ann's sharp tongue."

Here George turned off the main road, and

letting down a pair of bars that gave entrance into an extensive sheep pasture, once more shouldered his bundle and directed his course along a blind path which ran through a thick grove of evergreens. Fortunately he did not know what the future had in store for him.

The peace and comfort he hoped to find in his forest home were to be denied him. Already skillful plots, that were intended to work his ruin, were being laid against him, and George was destined to see the day when he almost wished that he had accepted his uncle's offer; but then it was too late.

"It seems to me that things might be made to work smoother and easier for some of us," said George, to himself, as he took off his hat and stopped for a moment under the wide-spreading branches of the evergreens to enjoy the grateful shade. "Dame Fortune has nothing but smiles for some folks, and, as she hasn't got enough to go round, the rest of us have to take frowns. Now, look at those fellows! If I had as much money as their guns cost, I could get an education that would en-

able me to be of some use in the world. Never mind; I'll have it yet.

George settled his hat on his head with a vigorous slap, and, running down the path, presently emerged from the evergreens, and found himself on the outskirts of a little field, which had been cultivated in the years gone by, but was now given over to briers and huckleberry bushes.

On the opposite side of this field, which was entirely surrounded by woods, was a huge rock, at whose base a spring of pure, cold water bubbled up.

Stretched at their ease on the grass near this spring were the "fellows," the sight of whom, as he caught a momentary glimpse of them through the trees, had started George on the train of thought with which he closed his soliloquy.

Their dress and accoutrements seemed to indicate that they had come out for a hunt; although it is hard to tell what they intended to shoot, it being too late in the season for ruffled grouse and quails, and too early for young squirrels. They were all the sons of

rich men—almost inseparable companions—and were rapidly acquiring the reputation of being a "hard crowd."

Careful and judicious fathers cautioned their sons against associating with them; but that did not seem to trouble these young fellows, who kept on enjoying themselves in their own way, and paying no heed to what others might say or think of them.

They were engaged in earnest conversation, and so deeply engrossed were they in the subject under discussion, whatever it was, that they did not hear the sound of George's approaching footsteps until he had come quite near to them.

"I tell you, boys," he heard one of them say, "that will be a ten-strike, and we can start on our western trip as soon as we please. You know that old Stebbins will not trust any of the banks, and consequently he must have the money in his house."

"But, of course, he keeps it stowed away in some snug hiding-place," said one of his companions, "and we don't know where that is, What good will it do to break

into the house if we can't find the money after we—"

The boy finished the sentence by uttering a cry of alarm and springing to his feet.

His two companions, who were no less alarmed, also jumped up, and were astonished beyond measure to see George Edwards standing within a few feet of them.

For a few seconds they stood regarding him with eyes that seemed ready to start from their sockets, while their faces grew whiter and their knees trembled beneath them.

The one who had last spoken was the first to recover his speech and power of action. Snatching up the hammerless gun that lay in the grass at his feet, he called out in savage tones:

"What are you doing here? Make yourself scarce at once, or I'll—"

"What are you about, Benson?" cried one of his companions, seizing the double-barrel, and giving its owner a look that was full of significance. "Why, man alive, have you taken leave of your senses? Don't you see who that is? Its Edwards—George Edwards."

"So it is," said Benson, lowering his gun, and calling a sickly smile to his frightened face. "You'll not feel very highly complimented, I know, George, but the fact is I took you for a tramp."

His two companions laughed loudly, and George smiled and threw his bundle down beside the spring.

"That's a good joke on you, Benson," said one of the young hunters who answered to the name of Wallace. "When we return to the village, you'll have to set up the cigars, if you want us to keep still about it."

"It's a bargain," replied Benson, laying his gun on the ground and seating himself beside it. "Are you travelling, George, or just going somewhere?"

"I am going somewhere," answered George, as he took a tin cup from his bundle and dipped it into the spring.

"Got a job?"

"No—don't want any, as long as I remain in this country."

"Going out to your cabin by the lake?"

George replied that he was; and, having

drained his cup, he leaned over to fill it again, the three hunters improving the opportunity to exchange glances that were full of meaning.

"How are you going to make a living out there during the winter?" inquired Benson. "In summer you can fish and pick berries; but when the snow covers the ground, and the lake is frozen clear to the bottom, then what?"

"The lake doesn't freeze clear to the bottom," said George, with a laugh. "I can supply the village with the muskalonge that I shall spear through the ice—I shall have a monopoly of that trade, you know, for the lake is so far away that no one thinks of going up there in winter—and the snow will afford me the means of tracking minks, raccoons and hares.

"Hares! You mean rabbits, I suppose?"

"No, I don't. There are no wild rabbits in America."

Benson opened his eyes, and showed a disposition to argue that point, but he was checked by a look from Wallace. He evidently understood just what it meant, for he

settled back on his elbow and relapsed into silence.

None of the hunters had anything to say after that, and George, believing that his absence would suit them better than his company, shouldered his bundle, said good-by, and struck into the path that led to the hills.

"You're a good one, Benson, you are!" exclaimed Wallace, as soon as he had satisfied himself that George was out of hearing. "You gave us dead away, in the first place, and then kept him here by talking to him."

"I wanted to allay his suspicions, if he had any," replied Benson. "That was the reason I talked to him."

"Was that the reason why you pointed your gun at him?" inquired the hunter who had not spoken before, and whose name was Forbes.

"I was a little too hasty, that's a fact," said Benson. "But you remember what we were talking about, do you not? Well, when I looked up and saw him standing there, almost

within reach of us, I was so badly frightened that I didn't know what I was doing. Do you suppose he heard anything?"

"Of course he heard something," growled Wallace, in reply. "He must be deaf if he didn't."

"But do you think he suspected anything?"

"Ah, that's another question! I hope not; but there's no telling. I can tell you one thing, however. There isn't room enough in the hills for George Edwards and our party, too, and one or the other must go."

"I was thinking of that myself," said Forbes. "He might discover something, you know, while he's prowling around in search of his minks and coons. Couldn't we drive him out by burning his shanty?"

"We might put him to some trouble, but we couldn't drive him out in that way," replied Wallace. "George is handy with an axe, and in two days' time he could build another cabin, and perhaps he would be smart enough to keep watch of it. But I shall not draw an easy breath as long as he is up there. If he should happen to stumble upon our cache? Whew!

We must think about this, boys, and decide upon something."

Meanwhile, George Edwards was plodding along towards the lake, and while he walked he pondered deeply. The incidents of the last half hour perplexed and astonished him. What was the meaning of Benson's unwarrantable excitement? and what was it that had caused the alarm so plainly visible on the faces of the three hunters when they first became aware of his approach?

"Benson never took me for a tramp," said George to himself. "That story was a fraud on the face of it. And, then, what business had they to be talking about old man Stebbins, and the money he is supposed to have in his house? It is a wonder to me that he hasn't been robbed a dozen times."

There were one or two other points in the conversation he had overheard that came into the boy's mind, but to which he did not then attach any importance. He did not think of them again until some days had passed away, and then they were recalled to his recollection in a most unexpected manner.

It was fifteen miles from George's old home to his home in the woods, and, as the road that led to it (if the blind path he followed could be called a road) ran up hill nearly all the way, it took him a long time to cover the distance—much longer than it usually did, for he was encumbered by his heavy bundle.

The sun was sinking behind the trees when he came out of the bushes and stopped to rest for a moment on a little promontory that jutted out into the deep-blue bosom of Lone Lake—a beautiful sheet of water, nine miles long and half as wide, and situated twenty-five hundred feet above the level of the sea—at least, that was what the young surveyors at the Montford Academy said.

George gazed upon its mirror-like surface as one gazes upon the face of a friend from whom he has long been separated. It had yielded him and his mother a support and kept a roof over their heads for two long years, and it was his main dependence now.

If any one had told him, that before the sun had again been reflected in those calm waters half a score of times, some scenes

would be enacted there that would change the whole course of his life, George would not have put the least faith in the statement; but it would have been the truth, nevertheless.

CHAPTER IV.

A HOME IN THE WOODS.

HAVING taken time to cool off and recover his breath, George once more lifted his bundle to his shoulder and resumed his journey. He had not more than two miles to go now, and as he followed the beach, where the walking was good, it took him but a short time to cover the distance.

The next time he threw down his bundle it was in front of a snug little cabin, built of rough logs, and situated on a little rise of ground that commanded a fine view of the lake.

"Things are all right outside," said George to himself, as he took a key from his pocket and inserted it into the padlock with which the heavy slab door was secured; "and that is something to wonder at. There are lots of mean boys in the village, and I was afraid

that some of them had been up here during my absence. Everything seems to be all right inside, too," he added, as the door swung open and the interior of the cabin was disclosed to view.

George stepped across the threshold as he spoke, and this was what he saw: A room twelve or thirteen feet square, with a heavy, ungainly-looking scow turned bottom upward in the middle of it; a wide fire-place with a stick chimney and a stone hearth; over it a rough mantel-piece, on which stood a lamp and several books; at the opposite end an open cupboard piled with bright tin dishes; under the cupboard a table and two or three stools, all made of slabs—and neatly made, too; in a corner, near the door, a pair of oars and a small sprit-sail made of unbleached muslin; and lastly, a cord hammock, with two quilts, as many blankets, and a pillow in it.

There was no floor in the cabin, and neither were there any windows. The ground, which was almost as hard as the stone that formed the hearth, was easily kept clean, and the door,

being allowed to stand open during the daytime, except in very stormy weather, admitted all the light that was necessary.

Some boys would have thought this a very cheerless and uninviting home, and so it was, but it was the only one George had. He had lived in the hope of some day being able to provide himself with a better.

"There's one thing about it," thought the boy, as he placed several sticks of round wood upon the ground and made preparations to roll the heavy scow out of the cabin, "I am my own master. There is no one to tell me what I shall do and what I shall not do, and all the money I make is my own. If I had agreed to Uncle Ruben's proposition, I should have to go hungry and half clad, listen to a scolding from Aunt Polly Ann every hour in the day, and now and then I'd have to take a cowhiding from Uncle Ruben. I'd much rather live here alone than with them, and I don't care if I never see—"

George's soliloquy was interrupted by a sound that startled him—the clatter of a horse's hoofs on the gravelly beach. He

looked out at the door, and was astonished to see Uncle Ruben riding toward the cabin.

If one might judge by the expression of his face he was in very good humor about something. Dismounting, he drew the bridle-rein over his horse's head, and dropped it to the ground so that the animal could not stray away, at the same time greeting his nephew with:

"Well, George, I don't reckon you expected to see me ag'in so soon, did you?"

"No, I didn't," replied the boy.

And Uncle Ruben would have been dull, indeed, if he had not been able to see that he was not wanted there.

"I didn't expect to see you, nuther," continued the man, seating himself on the scow, which had been rolled part way through the door. "But I thought mebbe I'd better have another leetle talk with you—"

"It's of no use," said George—"of no use whatever. If I had to live in the same house with you, I would not work for you for fifty dollars a month—"

—"another leetle talk with you," repeated

Uncle Ruben, paying no heed to the interruption, "for I think you will be willin' to listen to me now."

"Well, you are mistaken. I shall never agree to your proposition. I know you too well."

"I wouldn't git up on a high hoss, if I was in your place. 'Tain't becomin'," said Uncle Ruben, in a significant tone. "Hold on now," he added, seeing that George's face began to flush with indignation. "I ain't speakin' of what your father's done. I'm speakin' of what you have done yourself."

"I have done nothing to be ashamed of. I have tried to behave myself, and to deserve the respect of those around me. I have always made an honest living—"

"Have you, though? Well, there's them right here in this town as says you hain't," interrupted Uncle Ruben, with a triumphant air.

"Oh, I know that there are those who make a business of saying all sorts of unkind things about me," answered George, in a voice that was choked with indignation,

"but all they can say will not alter the facts of the case. I say now, and I don't care who disputes it—"

He suddenly paused, for there was an expression in his uncle's eyes that he could not understand. He looked steadily at him for a moment, and then seated himself on the other end of the scow.

"There, now!" said Uncle Ruben, in a tone of satisfaction. "I kinder thought that mebbe you'd be willin' to listen to reason after while. It's the gospel truth, an' folks do say it."

"What do they say?"

"They say they don't know where you got the money you used to spend at the store for the oranges an' trash you used to buy for your mother."

"Well, if you hear anybody asking any questions about it, you can just tell them, for me, that it's none of their business!" replied George, angrily.

"But folks 'll make it their business. You can't expect that they'll stand by an' let their stores be broke into an' robbed, an' their

butter an' chickens stole, without making a fuss about it. Don't stand to reason."

"Uncle Ruben, explain yourself," said George, jumping to his feet. "You don't mean to tell me—"

"Yes, I do," broke in the man, who knew what his nephew was about to say. "Everybody knows that you have been spendin' a heap of money sence your father was locked up, an' that you didn't make it by sellin' fish an' berries."

"How did I make it, then?" asked George, who was utterly bewildered.

"How can I tell? I don't know where all that nice butter an' them fine chickens an' silk goods went to. True, that's jest what folks say about you," continued Uncle Ruben, who saw that George was almost overwhelmed by the hints he had thrown out, "an' they'll keep on sayin' it as long as you live up here in this wild Injun fashion. Your Aunt Polly Ann, who sets a heap of store by you, has been to the trouble of fixin' up a nice bedroom for you, an' I promised her, sure, that I'd bring you home with me."

"Well, when you see her again, tell her that the reason that you didn't keep your promise was because I wouldn't go home with you," said George.

"You won't?" You'd better. Jest see how people are talkin' about you."

"Let them talk until they get tired, and then, perhaps they will stop. I'll not go," declared George, shortly.

"But you must. I've set my heart on it, an' so has your Aunt Polly Ann."

"I can't help that."

"The constable might come up here an' arrest you for a thief."

"I know he might, but he won't. At any rate, I'll take the risk. Now, Uncle Ruben, you might as well understand, first as last, that you can't scare me into going home with you. Let me shove the boat out, please. There is a storm coming up, and I want to go out on the lake and catch some fish for supper before it gets here."

"Well, George," said Uncle Ruben, as he arose to his feet, "I have tried to do my duty by you. I have offered you a good home, an'

give you fair warnin' of what will be sartin to happen to you if you hold to your fool notion of livin' up here all alone by yourself. Folks will think there's something wrong somewhere."

"They needn't trouble themselves about me. Let them attend to their own business, and I will attend to mine."

"If you git into trouble through your mulishness, you mustn't blame me for it."

"I won't. Good-by!"

"He's a bad boy—a monstrous bad boy!" soliloquized Uncle Ruben, as he mounted his horse and rode away; "an' he'll surely come to some bad end, jest as his father did before him. He shan't stay up here wastin' his time when he had oughter be at work, an' that's all there is about it."

George watched his uncle as long as he remained in sight, and then went to work to get his scow into the water. He was surprised and bewildered, but he was not frightened, for he could not bring himself to believe that the man had told him the truth. What reason could anybody have for saying that he was

the thief whose depredations had caused so great an excitement in the village?

"Uncle Ruben made it all up out of his own head," said George to himself, as he pushed the scow into the water and made the painter fast to a convenient tree, "and it is only one of the many mean tricks of which I know him to be guilty. The village people know where I live, and if they suspect me, let them come up here and find some of the stolen goods in my possession. That's a thing they can't do."

Consoling himself with this reflection, George went into the cabin again, and when he came out he brought out with him the oars belonging to the scow, and also a stout fishing-rod. It was not a jointed lancewood rod, with German-silver mountings, wound butt, and nickel-plated reel-seat, but simply a hickory sapling he had cut in the bushes.

George could not afford a fancy outfit, and this rod, which had cost him nothing at all, answered the purpose for which it was intended, and if he chanced to break it while playing a heavy fish, he could in five minutes provide himself with another just as good.

Having filled his box with bait, which he found under a log behind the cabin, George stepped into his scow and pushed her off from the beach.

Just then a loud peal of thunder echoed among the hills, and the smooth surface of the lake was ruffled by the first breath of the oncoming storm. A thick, black cloud which had been hanging in the horizon all day long, was now rising rapidly, and, during the five minutes that George had been employed in getting his boat into the water and digging his bait, it had covered the whole sky.

It was growing dark, and the lake looked black and threatening. It was a treacherous body of water—a capful of wind was enough to raise a sea that would try almost any boat—and George knew better than to trust himself upon it while a gale was raging.

"I guess I don't want any fish for supper," said he, as he shifted his oar to the other side of the boat, and pushed her back toward the beach. "I shall have to be satisfied with what I brought with me in my bundle. It's going to be a hard one," he added, as a strong

gust of wind lifted his hat from his head and carried it toward the cabin; "and I thank my lucky stars that I have a tight roof to shelter me. What in the world was that?"

Having drawn his scow high up on the beach, and fastened the painter securely to a tree, George ran to recover his hat; and just then, something that sounded like a cry for help came faintly to his ears.

Believing that the appeal came from the woods, George listened intently, and in a few seconds the cry was repeated. This time the wind brought it to him very plainly, and he caught the words:

"Help! help! Our boat is sinking!"

George looked in the direction from which the voice sounded, and was greatly astonished as well as alarmed, to see a cockle-shell of a boat dancing about among the waves, which had already grown to formidable proportions. While he gazed, she sank out of sight, and nothing but the top of the little shoulder-of-mutton sail she carried in the bow remained in view to show that she was still above water.

CHAPTER V.

A CAPSIZE.

GEORGE EDWARDS held his breath in suspense. The hull of the little craft was so long out of sight that he began to fear he would never see it again; but, all of a sudden, it bobbed up as buoyantly as a cork, and once more that frantic appeal for assistance was borne across the lake.

George was now able to see that there were two boys in the boat. One was clinging to the mast, waving his handkerchief over his head as a signal of distress, and the other was seated in the stern, wielding a clumsy-looking paddle, with which he endeavored to keep the boat before the wind.

George looked at them, and then he looked toward the promontory on which he had stopped to rest when he first reached the lake.

This promontory was about fifty feet in

height, and its base was thickly lined with rocks, over which the waves were dashing with great violence, throwing the spray high in the air. It was not more than half a mile distant, and the wind was driving the boat toward it with fearful rapidity.

"What lunatics those fellows must be to venture out on this lake when they don't know how to manage a boat!" exclaimed George. "If they hold that course they will be dashed to pieces on the rocks, as sure as they are living boys." Then, bringing his hands to his face, and using them as a speaking-trumpet, he shouted with all the power of his lungs, "Haul down your sail and pull for the beach!"

The boy who was holding on to the mast waved his signal of distress over his head, and then the boat sank out of sight again.

When she reappeared, George once more shouted to her crew to haul down the sail, at the same time striving to warn them of their danger by pointing toward the rocks and beckoning to them to come ashore.

But his instructions must have been mis-

understood, or else the boat's crew could not obey them, for their little craft kept driving on toward the rocks, while one of the boys continued to wave his handkerchief, and the other to ply his clumsy paddle.

It was plain that they could not save themselves, and that George was the only one who could render them any assistance. The boy's face grew pale when this fact flashed upon him, but it wore a very determined look.

"It's almost certain death," said he, as he cast off the painter and pushed the scow into the water; "but I can at least make the attempt. If I go under, there is nobody to miss me."

Pushing his scow through the surf, and wading until the water was nearly up to his waist, George clambered in, shipped the oars, and pulled out into the lake.

When Uncle Ruben was at the cabin, he had shown a disposition to turn up his nose at his nephew's boat, which was the boy's own handiwork; but if he could have seen how she behaved now, he would have learned that she was much better than she looked to

be. Being broad of beam and light of draught, she seemed to skim over the top of the waves instead of breaking through them, and, heavy as she was, George was able to send her ahead with considerable speed.

He rowed fast enough to intercept the sail-boat when she was within less than a quarter of a mile of the threatening rocks and then he found, greatly to his surprise, that she was a canoe, so lightly built, apparently, that a boy of ordinary strength could take her on his back and walk off with her with all ease.

She was making bad weather of it, for she was half-full of water, and every time she struck a wave she would bury her nose in it almost out of sight. If her two occupants realized the danger of their situation, they did not show it. They were as cool as boys could possibly be.

The one in the bow watched George's movements with a good deal of interest, while the dignified young fellow in spectacles, who was sitting in the stern and using the butt of his double-barrel for a paddle, issued his orders with great calmness and deliberation.

"Bring your boat around head to the wind, if you can, and let us come alongside of you," said he, addressing himself to George. "You will have to do all the work, for I have lost my paddle; and if the canoe should broach to, we'd be tumbled out into the lake before you could say 'General Jackson' with your mouth open."

George saw at a glance that the dignified young gentleman knew how to handle a canoe, and that in keeping the sail hoisted he was doing the best that could be done under the circumstances. If he had attempted to make the beach, he would have brought his cranky little craft broadside to the waves, and, having no centre-board, and scarcely any bearing, she would have been overturned in an instant, leaving her crew to sink, or drift helplessly toward the rocks.

That very thing did happen to her soon. Although George tried hard to place himself directly across her bows, the canoe shot wild of him; and in his efforts to bring her alongside the scow, the skipper lost control of her, and over she went, turning completely bottom upward.

The rocks were now but a short distance away, and the noise made by the waves as they dashed over them was enough to frighten anybody. George was frightened, and his pale face showed it.

It would have been a work of no little difficulty to row a light boat away from that dangerous spot; but to wait there long enough to pick up a couple of boys who were tossed about by the waves, now here, now there, and always just out of reach, to rescue them and then save himself, was a task requiring great skill and prudence.

George looked at the rocks and then he looked about for the canoe's crew. To his great joy they arose to the surface, one after the other, and they were close ahead of him, too. One was near enough to seize the gunwale of the scow, while the other promptly laid hold of the oar that was thrust out toward him.

"Where's Goggles?" asked the first, wiping the water out of his eyes, and looking around to find his companion.

"He's all right!" answered George. "Climb

in—quick! Not over the side, for your weight will capsize the scow. Go around to the stern. Be lively now, or the waves will throw us on the rocks."

The boy looked toward the breakers, but the sight of them did not seem to terrify him in the least. He worked his way around to the stern, climbed into the scow, and then turned to assist his companion, who was clinging to the oar with one hand, while in the other he held a light double-barreled shotgun.

"Say, Goggles!" said the boy in the boat; "I am just a hundred dollars out of pocket, by this day's work. Give us your gun. Mine is at the bottom of the lake. I told you your cranky little egg-shell wasn't seaworthy!"

"The canoe is all right, so far as her sea-going qualities are concerned," was the reply. "If I hadn't lost my paddle overboard, she would have taken us ashore without shipping so much as a cupful of water. But we have taken our last ride in her. She will be smashed into kindling-wood on those rocks."

"Haul him in! haul him in!" cried George,

in great excitement. "We shall be smashed into kindling-wood, too, if we don't get out of this! Now, then," he continued, as the boy who had been addressed as "Goggles" was dragged aboard, "take an oar, one of you, and pull for your life."

The boys had no light task before them, and if Goggles had not been a capital oarsman, it is hard to tell how the struggle would have ended.

For a long time the heavy boat seemed to remain stationary. With all their exertions, they could make no perceptible headway; but finally they began to gain a little, and, after half an hour's hard pulling, they succeeded in beaching the scow about half-way between the promontory and the cabin.

George landed there, because he thought it would be easier to walk a quarter of a mile than it would be to pull the boat that distance against the wind and the waves.

"Now, then," said Goggles, as he and his companion assisted in securing the boat, so that it would not drift away; "the next thing is something else. A fire to dry our

clothes by and something good to eat, would be very acceptable just now. Do you live far from here, my friend?"

"Only a short distance away," answered George. "If you will go up to my shanty, you can have both the fire and the supper. I can't promise you that the grub will be very good—"

"Say nothing about that," interrupted Goggles. "I hope we shall not put your folks to any trouble."

"No," replied George, sadly; "you'll not put them to any trouble." Then, seeing the expression of surprise and inquiry on the faces of the rescued boys, he added, "I am my own cook and housekeeper. I am living up here alone."

"Oh, you're out for a holiday, then! You came here to hunt and fish, I suppose?"

"Yes, I came here to fish; but I am not taking a holiday. It's a matter of bread and butter with me."

"You don't say so! Can't you find anything to do in the village?"

"No, I can't," replied George.

But he did not tell the boy the reason why.

"Well, there's no use in standing here in the rain any longer. Let's go up to your 'shanty,' as you call it. You have rendered us a most important service," said Goggles, with much feeling, as he took George's hand in both his own and shook it warmly. "I never saw anybody exhibit as much pluck as you have shown to-day. What can we do for you?"

"Take a big bite while you are about it," said the other boy, who had stood by, listening in silence to this conversation. "We owe our lives to you."

"You owe me nothing but your good-will," replied George. "I am sure you would have done as much for me."

"I don't know about that," replied Goggles, as the three hurried up the beach toward the cabin. "One needs courage, and a good share of it, too, to enable him to go deliberately into danger for the sake of helping somebody; and that's a quality I don't pretend to possess. Now, perhaps you would

like to know who we are. My friend here is Bob Howard, and he lives away out of the world, in a place called Arizona. I am Dick Langdon, at your service, and live in a white man's country, my home being in Connecticut."

"There's where the wooden nutmegs come from!" observed Bob Howard.

"My name is George Edwards, and I live there," said our hero, pointing to the cabin, which was now in plain sight.

It looked mean and forbidding now. It was good enough for him, for he had never been accustomed to luxurious surroundings; but, if there was any faith to be put in appearances, the boys who were to be his guests until the storm was over, were the sons of wealthy parents, and he thought they would look out of place under his humble roof.

He did not then know that one of them was more familiar with life in the woods than he was, and that he had many a time been glad to crawl into a hollow log for shelter. George didn't know, either, that his life and

Bob Howard's were destined to run along in the same channel, and that they were to be the heroes of an adventure that is talked of on the frontier until this day; but such was the fact.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK LANGDON'S SENTIMENTS.

"WE are students at the Montford Academy," said Dick Langdon. "Yesterday we asked for a short leave of absence, and came up here in search of fun and adventure."

"And we got all we wanted of both!" chimed in Bob Howard. "Dick lost his canoe, and I lost my gun, but we caught a splendid string of fish, and I had a twenty-minute fight with a muskalonge, that I shall remember as long as I live."

"You don't say anything about the narrow escape we had from having our brains dashed out on those rocks," observed Dick.

"There's no need that I should speak of that, for George knows as much about it as we do. By-the-way, do you suppose the

waves will leave anything of that canoe? Our fishing-rods were stowed in one of the lockers."

"I am afraid you have seen them for the last time," replied George. "But I don't think your gun is lost beyond recovery."

"How shall we go to work to get it?"

"If the lake is quiet to-morrow, we can dive for it. I think I can go right to the spot where your boat was capsized."

"How deep is the water?"

"About thirty feet."

"You don't pretend to say that you can bring up bottom at that depth, do you?"

"Oh, yes! I can go deeper than that, when I have a high place to take a plunge from."

"Well, you are better at diving than I am, and I will make it worth your while to get that gun for me. I value it highly, for it was the last thing my father gave me before I left my Western home to come to this academy. So this is where you live, is it?" said Bob, as George entered the cabin door and invited them to enter.

Wood was already laid upon the hearth, and it was but the work of a moment to touch a lighted match to it and set it going.

Then George and his new friends pulled off some of their wet clothes, and, having wrung the water out of them, they hung them over the stools to dry.

The fire was soon blazing merrily, and, as the boys turned themselves slowly about in front of it and listened to the howling of the storm and the beating of the rain on the roof, they felt a sense of comfort and security that was decidedly refreshing after their recent experience.

"Now, isn't this glorious?" said Dick Langdon, adjusting his spectacles and spreading his hands over the warm blaze. "I believe there must be some Indian about me, for do you know, fellows, that I have often thought I should like to live this way all my life?"

Without waiting for an answer, Dick straightened up, turned his back to the fire and sung, in a clear, mellow voice:

"I've a home in the woods, the dark green woods,
'Neath the shade of the old oak tree,
Where the wild birds warble their songs of praise,
In tones so wild and free.
A lovely place is this home of mine—
A quiet, a dear little spot;
And over my casement the vine doth entwine,
Like an angel, to watch o'er my cot!"

"The sentiment is very fine, no doubt," said Bob Howard. "But if that dear little home of yours was covered with snow, so that you couldn't stir out of it for months; and your firewood gave out, and the wolves came and serenaded you every day and glared down at you through the chimney; and your provisions run short, and you saw starvation staring you in the face! I tell you what's a fact, Dick; I know something about that. There has been a good deal of nonsense written about life in the woods. You could not stand it three months."

"I'd like to try," said Dick.

"I'll change places with you," said George. "I'll give you my house, if you will give me your seat at the academy."

"Would you like to go there?"

"Indeed I would."

"Then, why don't you go?"

George was so surprised at this question, that he did not reply to it.

Why didn't he go? Where were his guest's eyes and ears? Would he, or any other boy, who was in full possession of his senses, be likely to make a hermit of himself from choice?

Of course, he could not tell them that he had no money to pay for four years' tuition at the academy, and so he held his peace; but his silence told his new friends all they wanted to know, and they then and there made up their minds to act accordingly.

After the two boys had warmed themselves and dried their clothing, Dick proceeded to overhaul his gun, and Bob assisted George in laying the table and preparing supper.

It was not much the latter had to place before his guests—nothing but bread and butter, a few vegetables and a cup of tea; but there were half a dozen young squirrels in Bob's game-bag, which the owner had saved

simply because it happened to be slung over his shoulder when the canoe was capsized; and when these had been cleaned and roasted over the coals, the meal was ready.

George's long walk had given him a good appetite, and the ducking Dick and Bob had received must have had a similar effect upon them, for the edibles rapidly disappeared, and in a few minutes every bone had been picked clean.

"How did you two fellows happen to find your way to this lonely region?" asked George, as he threw more wood on the fire and drew one of the stools into the chimney corner.

"Oh, we have often heard of this lake and the fine fishing that could be enjoyed here, if one had a boat to go about in; so I sent home for my canoe," replied Dick Langdon. "When it came, we hired a team to bring us and our trappings up here, and asked the professor for a holiday. We are to go back to-morrow night, for no student is allowed to be away from the village over Sunday, unless he is known to be at home, where he can't get into mischief."

"Where is your camp?"

"We havn't any. We slept in Mr. Stebbins' barn last night."

"In his barn!" repeated George. "Why didn't you go into the house?"

"Because the old fellow wouldn't let us," said Dick, with a laugh. "We gave him abundant proof that we were able to pay for our supper and lodging, but he would not listen to us."

"And while he was talking to us, he held the door open just about two inches," observed Bob. "He acted as if he was afraid of us."

"Very likely he was," said George. "If all reports are true, he's got a pile of money hidden away somewhere in his house."

"Ah, that accounts for his suspicions, then. For a while, we thought we would have to stay out of doors all night," continued Dick; "but finally, the old fellow said we might sleep on the hay, if we wouldn't smoke. And just before dark he brought us a mouthful of bread and butter and about half a pint of milk."

"And charged us a dollar for it!" said

Bob, in a tone of disgust. "He's a regular old skin-flint. But if he keeps so much money in the house, I shouldn't think he and his wife would want to live there alone. If some tramp should happen to find it out, it might be bad for them, for they are too old to defend themselves, and there isn't another house on the lake—is there?"

"Yes, there is one at the lower end," replied George; "but I am his nearest neighbor."

When bedtime came, George spread all his quilts and blankets on the floor in front of the fire, and he and his guests went to sleep, lulled by the howling of the storm, which continued to rage with unabated fury until long after midnight; but the morning broke bright and clear, and at the first peep of day the boys were astir.

They looked out at the door, and saw that the lake was as smooth as a mill-pond. There was nothing to prevent them from making an attempt to recover Bob Howard's lost fowling-piece.

"But first, I must have a good breakfast

of fish," said that young gentleman. We lost those we caught yesterday, but fortunately, I have both hooks and lines in one of the pockets of my game-bag."

"And there's an axe, and you will find plenty of poles behind the cabin," said George. "While you are cutting them, I will go down and bring up the scow."

"Did you save any cartridges?" asked Dick Langdon, who stood just outside the door, with his head turned on one side, as if he were listening intently.

"I did; and as they are loaded in water-proof cases, they are not injured in the least."

"Well, your gun is the same calibre as mine, and if you will give me some of those cartridges, I'll see if I can get a squirrel or two for breakfast. I hear one barking out there in the woods."

Bob handed his game-bag to Dick, who slung it over his shoulder and set out in search of the squirrels, while George hurried down the beach to bring up the scow.

By the time he returned, Bob had rigged a pole and dug a supply of bait; and when

he had got into the boat, George pulled him to the nearest fishing-ground.

"There's nothing like knowing where to go to find the best places," said Bob, half an hour later, as he surveyed with no little satisfaction, the fine string of yellow perch which was floating in the water alongside the scow. "Yesterday, Dick and I tried all the likely spots along the opposite shore, but we didn't get a bite until we got down to the lower end of the lake."

"That was because you didn't understand the habits of the fish," replied George. "When the season first opens, you will find them along the beach, just outside the weeds; but as the weather grows warmer, they draw off into deep holes, and at this time of the year you will find the best fishing in about forty feet of water."

While Bob was engaged in hauling in the perch, almost as fast as he could bait his hook, Dick Langdon was not idle. His gun spoke at short intervals, and as Dick was a fine marksman, he did not throw away a single charge of shot.

When the fishermen returned to the cabin, they found him sitting on a log in front of it, with half a dozen gray squirrels at his side. He might have secured as many more if he had felt so disposed, but being a thorough-bred young sportsman, he did not believe in killing more game than he could use.

Breakfast was soon cooked and eaten, and then Dick and Bob announced that they were ready to see George make an attempt to recover the lost fowling-piece.

The lake being quiet, they had a fair view of the rocks on which they had so narrowly escaped being wrecked, and they shuddered as they looked at them.

CHAPTER VII.

A PERSEVERING DIVER.

BOB rowed the boat, George stood in the bow, divested of his clothing and all ready to make the plunge, and Dick sat in the stern and looked at the rocks.

"I tell you, they look ugly!" said he, with another involuntary shudder. "If it hadn't been for you, George, there would have been two vacant seats at the Montford Academy next Monday. What's that wedged in between those two high rocks, a little to the left of the point? It looks to me like a piece of my lost canoe."

"That's just what it is!" answered George, "We'll go up there and take a look at it as soon as I find out whether or not I am going to get that gun. We are pretty near the spot now. Steady! There!"

As Bob ceased rowing and faced about on

his seat, there was a splash in the water, and George had disappeared. He was gone a good while—so long that the two boys who were awaiting the result of his experiment, began to look at each other with some uneasiness.

At length, Dick asked suddenly:

"I say, Bob, what are you going to give him if he finds your gun for you?"

"That's exactly what I wanted to speak to you about," was Bob's reply. "I don't think it would be quite the thing to offer him money, for he doesn't look to me like a boy who would go to all this trouble for the sake of earning a reward."

"That's my opinion, and I will tell you what I have been thinking of. You know he said he would like to go to the academy; and he said it in a way that led me to believe that the only obstacle that stands in his way is a lack of money. Now you and I have more spare change than we can use, and if you will pay half his tuition, I'll pay the other half. He needn't know that we're doing anything for him, for I have an idea that he would refuse—"

Before Dick could finish his sentence, George's head bobbed up out of the water, a short distance away; but the only thing he brought with him was a handful of gravel, to show that he had been to the bottom.

A few long, sweeping strokes brought him alongside the boat. He climbed in over the bow, and, after taking a moment's breathing spell, he went down again.

This time he was gone longer than before, and Dick and Bob had ample leisure to decide upon something.

What it was, you will learn as our story progresses.

The second attempt to recover the lost weapon resulted in failure, and so did the third and fourth; but the fifth was successful. A hand, grasping the little double-barrel, suddenly appeared above the surface of the water, followed an instant after by the persevering diver, who was as highly elated over his achievement as Bob Howard was himself.

"George," said he, as he grasped the gun and began rubbing it briskly with his hand-

kerchief, "I don't know how to thank you for the service you have rendered me."

"Then you had better not try," advised George, with a laugh. "That's a beautiful little piece, and well worth saving. Now, I wish I could give Dick his canoe in good order."

"Thank you! But that is something that nobody this side of Troy can do. She is made of paper."

George, who had never before heard of such a thing as a paper canoe, opened his eyes and looked incredulous; but when he had pulled over to the rocks and taken a look at the wreck that was stranded there, he found that Dick had told him nothing but the truth. The little craft had been torn completely in two. The stern was nowhere to be seen, and the bow was wedged so tightly between the rocks that they could not get it out.

"I say, Bob, take the butt of your oar and break a hole through the bottom," said Dick. "Perhaps we shall find something in there."

And so they did.

Through the opening that Bob's heavy oar

speedily made in the frail covering he gained access to the forward locker, from which he drew forth two jointed fishing-rods, and also a liberal supply of canned goods, such as salmon, lobsters, condensed milk, and fried brook trout.

He likewise brought to light a canister of ground coffee, about half a peck of potatoes, and lastly, a water-proof bag, which, on being opened, was found to contain a quantity of crackers, bread, and ginger-snaps, and also two blackberry pies.

George looked on in wonder.

"Did I understand you to say that you are going back to the academy to-night?" said he.

"You did," assured Bob, panting from his exertions. "Why do you ask?"

"I don't wonder that you had to hire a team to bring you up here," continued George. "You had your canoe provisioned for a four-weeks' cruise."

"That shows how much you know about an academy boy's appetite," said Dick. "Whenever we go into the country for a holiday, we always make our entertainers open their eyes.

Find anything more, Bob? Well, then, shove off. We'll stop at the cabin long enough to unload our cargo and give our poles a good rubbing, and then, perhaps, George will be kind enough to show us where we can catch a good string of bass. We don't want to go back to the academy empty-handed, you know; for if we do the fellows will laugh at us."

George's guests thoroughly enjoyed themselves that day.

Having caught a pailful of minnows for them, George rowed them down to his favorite fishing-grounds, and by the time the fish stopped biting they had sixteen black bass to show to the academy boys as trophies of their skill.

George offered to increase the size of their string by adding to it the fish he had caught himself—being an expert angler, he had caught an even dozen while the others were catching sixteen—but Dick and Bob would not listen to it. When they exhibited their fish they wanted to be able to say that they had caught them all themselves, and they

couldn't say that if they accepted any help from George.

The dinner that was served up in the cabin that afternoon was the best that George had eaten for many a day, and he disposed of his full share of it.

When they had satisfied their appetites, Dick and Bob began to get ready to start for home.

"Now, George," said the latter, as he shouldered his gun and fishing-rod, which he had tied together so that they could be easily carried, "how much do we owe you?"

"Not a red cent," was George's reply.

"Cheap enough," said Dick. "We'll come again."

"I hope you will. I shall be glad to see you at any time—that is, if you can be satisfied with such poor accommodations as I have to offer you."

"Say nothing about that!" exclaimed Bob. "What better accommodations can we ask for than a tight roof, a good bed and plenty to eat and drink?"

"And good hunting and fishing within a

stone's throw of your door," chimed in Dick. "You may expect us next Friday evening. We can get away every week if we only behave ourselves during study hours, and I am perfectly willing to be good for five consecutive days for the sake of enjoying such squirrel shooting as I had this morning."

As the nearest way to the village was through Mr. Stebbins' sheep pasture, George took his guests across the lake in his boat, thus saving them a three-mile walk.

After putting them on the road, and giving them explicit directions regarding the course they were to follow in order to reach the academy, George said good-by, and set out on his return to the lake; but while he was crossing the sheep pasture he was confronted by Mr. Stebbins, who, in no amiable tones, demanded to know what he was doing there, and what business he had to bring those young vagabonds on his grounds.

"They are not vagabonds," replied George, with some spirit. "They are gentlemen, and that is more than I can say for some other people I know."

"I don't want none of your sass!" snapped the old man, angrily, at the same time whisking a heavy black snake whip he carried in his hand. "I tell you that I don't like the looks of them fellers."

"I can't help it, can I?" asked George.

"I never slept a wink t'other night," continued Mr. Stebbins, "'cause they was in my barn, an' I was expectin' every minute that they would break into my house an' rob me. I don't want them to come foolin' round here no more. You hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you. They will be up here again next Friday night, and I will tell them what you say."

"Wal, they shan't sleep in my barn ag'in, if they do come up here, 'cause I'm afeared of 'em. Why don't they stay to home, where they belong? They've got no 'arthly business up here. An' I tell you another thing I don't like," went on Mr. Stebbins, flourishing his whip over his head. "Be you livin' over there on t'other side of the lake?"

The boy replied that he was.

"I thought so, 'cause I seed a smoke com-

in' out of the chimbly. Now I don't want you nor nobody else over there, an' I won't have it, nuther."

"Is my cabin on your grounds?" questioned George.

"No, it ain't," said Mr. Stebbins, emphatically.

"Then you have nothing to say about it. I had permission from the man who owns that land to build my cabin there, and so long as he does not object, you have no right to complain."

"Hain't I though?" Mr. Stebbins almost shouted. "Wal, I shall ask the selectmen about that. There's a poorhouse pervided for them that ain't able to make an honest livin' for themselves."

"I am able to make an honest living," said George, with no little indignation in his tones, "and I shall not go to the poorhouse to please anybody."

"You ain't your own boss yet by a few years," reminded the man, with a sneer; "an' if you're too stuck up to earn a livin' by hard work, like an honest boy had

oughter do, you may find yourself in jail, the first thing you know. Iv'e been a-lookin' for it, 'cause there's been a heap of stealin'— Wal, go on; but remember what I'm a-tellin' you."

George, who was too angry to listen to another word, hurried down to the beach, sprang into his boat, and pushed off into deep water.

His little cabin was lonely enough now. He missed his new friends, whom he had learned to like during his short acquaintance with them, and his interview with Mr. Stebbins had thrown a gloom over him that he could not shake off.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNCLE RUBEN CALLS AGAIN.

DURING the next few days, George was permitted to live in peace, but we cannot say that he enjoyed himself, for at times he felt very lonely, and bitter, too.

While other boys in the village were given every opportunity to work their way up in the world, he had been driven into exile by force of circumstances, and just now he did not see how he could better his condition.

"I have heard people say that it is always darkest just before daylight, and if that is the case, my day must be close at hand," George often said to himself. "Things couldn't look darker to me than they do now; but if a canal boy can become President, I don't see why a fisher-boy cannot become a decent, respected member of society, if nothing

more. I shall work hard for it, and if I fail, it will not be my fault."

Every other day George carried to the village a nicely-dressed string of fish, for which he found ready sale, bringing back with him such supplies as he happened to need.

He always found everything in and about the cabin just as he had left it, and there was nothing to indicate that there had been any one there during his absence.

But, for all that, there had been visitors at the cabin on two different occasions. These visitors were in no way connected with each other, although they had the same object in view, as we shall presently see.

The first to come was a party of three boys —the same ones that George had met at the spring a few days before, and who had exhibited so much surprise and alarm at his sudden appearance.

Two of them carried bundles under their arms, and the third was provided with a spade.

That they did not want to be seen by anybody was evident. They spent an hour or

more in reconnoitering the premises. Having at last fully satisfied themselves that George was nowhere in the vicinity, they made their way behind the cabin, and the one who carried the spade set to work to dig a hole in the ground.

This being done, the other two deposited their bundles in it, the earth was thrown upon them, and finally dead leaves were spread evenly over the spot, to hide all traces of their labor.

"That's about the idea," said one of the party. We've put evidence enough there to remove all suspicion from ourselves."

"I don't think much of it," said another. "If those bundles should be discovered before the rest of the work is done, it would spoil everything."

"So it would," admitted the first speaker. "But we must not wait long enough for that. We must pay our visit to Stebbins' some night this week. Besides, I don't see that these bundles are in any immediate danger of discovery. The constable won't go to prowling about there until we put him on the track."

"And we must do that as soon as we can," said the one who had not spoken before; "for the sooner George is compelled to leave this neighborhood, the better it will be for us. If he should happen to stumble on our headquarters during his rambles, we might find ourselves in a pretty mess."

The boys left the cabin as cautiously as they had approached it.

And the next visitor who came was none other than Uncle Ruben, who looked better natured now than he did the last time we saw him.

"I'll fix him," he kept muttering to himself. "I'll l'arn him to throw away the chance of a good home, when he might have had it jest as well as not. I am his only livin' relation, so to speak, an' I had oughter be his gardeen an' have the profits of his work till he comes of age; but he wouldn't let me, an' now I'll put him where he'll have to work for nothing."

Uncle Ruben also carried a bundle under his arm, and, as it was not very neatly made up, the contents of it could have been named

by any one who had chanced to meet him on the road. The heads of a couple of chickens, whose necks had been wrung, stuck out of one end of it, while two pairs of yellow legs projected from the other.

The man made his appearance late on Friday afternoon. He was not as stealthy in his movements as the first visitors were, for he knew that the coast was clear, having seen his nephew sail up the lake toward Mr. Stebbins' farm.

What business the boy had up there Uncle Ruben did not know; but of course his suspicions were aroused, and it was not long before those suspicions gave way to positive conviction.

Having hitched his old clay-bank back in the bushes, out of sight, Uncle Ruben hastened to the rear of the cabin, and, picking up a sharp stick, he began raking away the leaves and digging in the ground, thus making it evident that he was preparing a place of concealment for the chickens he had brought with him.

By the merest accident he struck upon

the very spot on which the boys of whom we have spoken had hidden *their* bundles, and he was not long in bringing them to light.

"What on 'arth is them?" soliloquized Uncle Ruben' as the bundles were thrown out of the hole one after the other.

His eyes opened to their widest extent, his under jaw dropped down, and he seemed to be very much disconcerted by the discovery he had made.

He looked all around to make sure that he was alone, and then, after a moment's hesitation, he dropped down on his knees and began untying the strings with which the bundles were fastened.

The first was found to contain half a dozen new pocket-books, and a bolt of fine linen that had never been cut; and the second was made up principally of razors, revolvers, powder- and shot-flasks and jack-knives.

"Now, I *am* astonished," said Uncle Ruben; and the word he used conveyed but a very faint idea of the bewilderment and confusion into which his mind had been thrown

by the sight of the articles upon which he had so unexpectedly stumbled. "I never did b'lieve that George was to blame for them stores bein' broke into, but what is a feller to think of this, I'd like to know?"

Right on the heels of this question came others that were just as hard to answer.

Should he put the bundles back as he found them, and let matters take their own course? or, would it be better to await George's return and confront him with the evidence of his guilt, at the same time promising never to lisp a word of it to anybody if the boy would consent to be bound out to him until he was twenty-one years old?

"There's objections to both them plans," thought Uncle Ruben, after he had spent some minutes in trying to find a way out of his quandary. "George had oughter be punished for refusin' to go home with me like I wanted him to do, an' if he is shut up for a thief I want him to know that I had a hand in it. That's what I bring them chickens up here for. But if he *is* shut up, he won't never come nigh me arter he gets out, an' I ain't

by no means sart'in that I want him to; for, jest as like as not, he'll go to stealin' from *me*. Mebbe I had better go home and sleep on it."

Having come to this conclusion, Uncle Ruben hastily tied up the bundles again, tossed them back into the hole and covered them up.

He had already wasted considerable time, and being anxious to reach home before dark, he did not stop to bury the chickens. He simply threw them into the bushes, marking the spot on which they fell, so that he could easily find them again if circumstances should require it, and then he mounted his horse and rode away.

Meanwhile, George Edwards was sitting on a log by the side of the road that led from the village to Mr. Stebbins' farm, waiting as patiently as he could for the coming of his expected friends, Bob Howard and Dick Langdon.

Remembering his last interview with the choleric old man, and the orders he had given regarding his "vagabond" acquaintances, George had landed with his scow in a little

cove near the promontory, and made his way by a roundabout course to the road, in order to intercept his expected guests before they crossed the sheep pasture.

He did not want them to be insulted, as he knew they would be if Mr. Stebbins should catch them on his grounds; but still he need not have taken so much pains to prevent it, for he did not see Dick and Bob that night.

He waited for them until long after dark, and then went back to his boat and pulled for the cabin, feeling very lonely indeed.

"I have looked forward to this night with many pleasurable anticipations, and it is hard to be disappointed," thought George. "The shanty will look as gloomy now as it did last Saturday when those fellows first went away. Well, I will hope for better luck next week."

George slept but little that night, and he was up the next morning long before the sun.

Having lighted the fire, he opened the door, and the first objects that attracted his attention, as he stepped across the threshold, were two boys who were coming down the

beach at a rapid walk. He recognized them at a glance.

"There they are now!" he exclaimed, pulling off his hat and swinging it about his head. "They have brought their guns and fishing-rods with them, and each one has a pack of something on his back. More provisions, I suppose. They haven't come from the village this morning, and consequently they must have laid out all night."

The approaching boys answered his greeting by flourishing their caps in the air, and George hastened to meet them, fully prepared to laugh at them for losing their way, when the road that led from the village to the lake was as plain as the beach they were then following; but as he drew nearer to them he saw that something had gone wrong with them.

Their faces were flushed, and their quick, nervous movements showed that they were excited and angry.

"What's the matter?" asked George. "And where did you stay last night? Did you miss your way?"

"I should say so," answered Bob, in a tone of deep disgust.

"And you had to stay in the woods, I suppose?"

"No, we didn't. I wish to goodness we had. We camped in old Stebbins' barn; and 'thereby hangs a tale'—one that will astonish you, too."

"I am very sorry you went near that barn," said George. "If you had come up here last night—I waited for you at the road until after dark—I should have told you that the old fellow gave me fits for taking you across his sheep pasture last Saturday. He had a good notion to horsewhip me."

"He had a good notion to serve us worse than that this morning," said Dick Langdon. "But don't waste any more time in standing here. Bob and I went to bed without any supper to speak of, and we are as hungry as wolves."

While they were on their way to the cabin, George came to the conclusion that his friends must have had a very animated interview with Mr. Stebbins, during which the latter had said

some things that were in the highest degree exasperating; for they grumbled at him every step they took, and gave full and free expression to the opinions they had formed concerning him.

Having relieved himself of his heavy pack —a neat camper's basket, which was provided with straps like a soldier's knapsack, and filled so full of something that a cloth had been tied over the top to keep the contents from falling out—and deposited his gun and fishing-rod in one corner of the cabin, Bob Howard took possession of the bench beside the door and said, abruptly, addressing himself to George:

"You remember of saying something to us about the money that Mr. Stebbins is supposed to have hidden in his house, do you not? Well, sir, three masked robbers came there last night and tried to get it. At least, they tried to break into the house, and we suppose they were after the money."

George was profoundly astonished.

CHAPTER IX.

LOST IN THE WOODS.

"I suppose you don't know who the robbers were?" said George, as soon as he had recovered his power of speech.

"No, we don't," answered Bob Howard. "They wore masks, as I told you; and, besides, the night was so dark that we could not have recognized our most intimate friends at the distance we were from them."

"The most provoking part of the whole business was this," said Dick Langdon. "After Bob and I became satisfied that the masked parties, whoever they were, had come there for no good purpose, we opened fire on them and drove them away. And what did the old miser do to repay us for the assistance we rendered him?"

"Did he ask you in to breakfast?" inquired George, who knew very well that he had done nothing of the kind.

"Not much!" was Dick's reply. "If he had, we wouldn't be as hungry as we are now. We went to sleep on the hay, after we had frightened the robbers away from the house, and the first thing we heard this morning was a war-whoop, and the first thing we saw, after we had got our eyes open, was old Stebbins, who was standing in the barn door, with a shotgun in his hands."

"It was pointed straight at my head, too," said Bob; "and I really thought, by the way the old fellow talked and acted, that he was going to turn loose on me. I believe he would, too, if it hadn't been for Dick, who— You don't understand it, do you?" he added, seeing that George was greatly surprised and bewildered. "Sit down here, and I will begin at the beginning, and tell you all about it. Breakfast can wait."

Bob settled back into an easy position on the bench, while George seated himself by his side, and listened with much interest to the story of his friends' adventure, which was related substantially as follows:

When Dick and Bob returned to the vil-

lage, with the fine string of bass they had caught on the preceding Saturday, they quickly found themselves surrounded by a crowd of their schoolmates, who asked a thousand and one questions regarding their experience in the woods, and demanded the privilege of accompanying them on their next excursion.

There were some in the crowd whom the lucky fishermen would not have taken out to the lake with them under any consideration whatever—mean, overbearing fellows, who always wanted their own way in everything, and who would not have seen any pleasure in the trip themselves, or allowed their companions to see any.

Others there were, whose presence would have added to everybody's enjoyment; but George's quarters were small, and, as he had not told them to bring any of their friends with them when they came again, the boys did not feel authorized to issue any invitations. They gave away the most of their bass, the principal, of course, coming in for the lion's share.

It is probable that the good man enjoyed his Sunday morning breakfast, or else Dick and Bob behaved themselves better and gained a greater number of credit marks than the rest of the students, for they were the only ones among a dozen or more applicants who received permission to spend the next Saturday at the lake.

They packed their baskets on Friday morning, gave their guns and fishing-rods a good rubbing up, and at a quarter-past four in the afternoon they were on their way to the woods; but they got lost before they were fairly out of sight of the village.

They were quite certain they had taken the right road, but it did not seem at all familiar to them. When Bob said this, George broke in with:

"When you were traveling that same road last Saturday, did you stop every now and then to look behind you?"

No, Bob couldn't say that they did. In fact, he couldn't see that there was any need of it, for they were going toward the village, and not toward the lake.

"That was the very reason why you ought to have taken your bearings occasionally," said George. "Hereafter, when you are traveling through a piece of woods with which you are not acquainted, make it a point to stop every quarter of a mile or so and look back, being careful to note the shape of the trees and the lay of the land. If you will do that you will never get lost, for your eye will be sure to rest on some landmark that you will recognize when you return."

Bob remarked that he would bear that in mind, and went on with his story.

They must have strayed away from the main thoroughfare, he said, for all of a sudden the road they were following came to an end in a brush-heap.

They tried to retrace their steps but found they couldn't do it; and the longer they walked, the more hopelessly bewildered did they become.

Knowing that the lake lay somewhere to the north of them, they took the points of the compass from the sun, which had by this time sunk so low in the west that his beams

just touched the tops of the tallest trees, and, making no further effort to find the road they had lost, they drew a bee-line through the woods, scrambling over fallen logs and forcing their way with difficulty through the dense thickets of trees and bushes that lay in their path.

For a time, they held their course with tolerable accuracy, but when the sun set and the woods became so dark that they could scarcely see each other's faces, Dick Langdon, who was a city boy and entirely unaccustomed to severe and long-continued exertion, declared that he was completely fagged out, and that he could not possibly go any further.

"My back aches under this heavy pack, and my gun and rod seem to weigh a ton," said he, with a despairing groan. "We can't find George's cabin to-night."

"And I have my doubts about finding it in the morning," said Bob, cheerfully. "If you want to camp here all night, scrape some of these dry leaves together and start a blaze, while I look around for some firewood."

"I wish now that we had shot some of the squirrels that had the impudence to bark at us as we came along," said Dick, depositing his heavy basket at the foot of the nearest tree, and drawing together a pile of leaves, as his companion had requested. "They would have made a good supper for us; but, as it is, we shall have to be satisfied with bread and butter and a cup of tea. Hand out the matches."

"I have none. Didn't you bring some with you?"

"No. I didn't suppose we should need any."

Bob uttered a low, long-drawn whistle.

"Here's the mischief to pay, and nothing to pay it with," said he. "We've got a gloomy night before us, Dick, but that needn't worry you any. It's nothing when you get used to it."

"No matches!" exclaimed Dick, trying to pierce the almost impenetrable darkness with eyes that must have been very badly frightened, for they persisted in transforming every tree and bush into some dangerous beast that was about to open hostilities. "No matches!" he repeated, shivering all over as the mourn-

ful hoot of a distant owl came faintly to his ears. "Bob, I wouldn't stay here all night without fire for all the money there is in America."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Bob, who was very much surprised.

As it was nothing new for him to pass a night in the woods, he didn't care whether he had a fire to sit by or not, and he could not imagine why his companion should exhibit so much timidity.

"There is nothing in this country bigger than a raccoon—"

"I know that," interrupted Dick; but I don't want to stay here in the dark. I would much rather go on, tired as I am."

"All right," replied Bob, who thought so much of Dick that he was willing to do anything that would add to his comfort. Grab hold of my coat-tail, and I will lead you out of this, if I can. Keep your arm before your face, so the bushes will not hit you when they fly back."

"He'd make a good one to spend a night in the mountains, where grizzlies and pan-

thers are plenty, wouldn't he?" added Bob to himself. "If he is startled by the hoot of an owl, how would he act while listening to such a serenade as a pack of gray wolves could give him?"

Bob was hungry and tired, too, and would have preferred a cold bite and a sound sleep under the lee of some friendly log to a fatiguing tramp through the woods that were almost pitch dark; but still, he did not complain.

Using the butt of his fishing-rod as a cane, he felt his way through the darkness, and presently, to his great surprise, as well as delight, he found himself on solid ground, and saw the stars looking down at him through an opening in the trees.

"I declare, Dick, we have stumbled upon the road at last," he said; and in order to make sure of it, he bent down and passed his hand over the ground. "It is the road," he repeated, "for I can feel the ruts made by the wheels. Now, let's hurry on, and we will soon find out how far we are from Mr. Stebbins' barn. I don't suppose the old fellow will like it—"

"We don't care whether he likes it or not," broke in Dick, who was so weary that he could hardly drag one foot after the other. "We'll sleep there, all the same, and if we leave in the morning before he comes out, he will never know that we have been near his old barn."

Fortunately, the sheltering roof of which they were now in search was not far away.

About half a mile further on, they came to the sheep pasture, and, when they had crossed it, they found themselves standing in front of Mr. Stebbins' barn, which was no whit darker or gloomier than the dwelling-house that was but a short distance away.

It was evident that the owner of the premises had gone to bed, and, as they knew better than to arouse him in order to obtain permission to sleep on the hay, they opened the door and entered without ceremony; but they could not close the door behind them, for the only fastening that had been provided for it was a wooden pin, which fitted into an auger hole on the outside of the casing.

Having seen the inside of the barn in broad

daylight, the boys knew just how it was arranged, and consequently they had no difficulty in finding a way to the hay-mow.

Dick threw himself down upon it with a sigh of relief, and prepared to go to sleep; while Bob, whose empty stomach had long been calling for something nourishing, thrust his hand into his basket and finally fished out a sandwich.

"Better take a bite before you go off into the land of dreams," he said to his companion. "We shall have no breakfast until we reach George's cabin, and that is at least two miles from here."

Dick was too sleepy to make any response; so Bob left off bothering him, and sat there in the dark, munching his sandwich and wondering what the academy fellows would say when they learned that he, a born backwoodsman, had been lost in a little piece of timber that was scarcely larger than one of his father's sheep-farms.

He came very near falling asleep while he was thinking about it; but, all on a sudden, he was aroused to full consciousness by the

sound of voices and footsteps outside the barn. An instant later, a head was thrust in at the open door. Bob could see it very distinctly, because it was between him and the light; but the eyes that belonged to the head could not distinguish Bob's form, for the barn was as dark as a pocket.

"It is a party of our fellows who have taken French leave, found their way up here by accident, and who intend to have a day's sport at fishing, in spite of the principal's prohibition," thought Bob, as he rested his elbows on his knees, and waited to see what the newcomers were going to do. "As the owner of this hotel is not present, and Dick is fast asleep, I think it nothing more than fair that I should act as master of ceremonies and give them a hearty greeting."

Before he could act on this resolution, the newcomers entered the barn. There were three of them, and Bob saw at once that they had come there with a well-defined object in view, for they said and did some things that astonished and alarmed him.

CHAPTER X.

THE MASKED ROBBERS.

"THIS is a good place to put on our disguises, fellows," said one of the intruders, in a low tone. "In ten minutes more we shall be rich men. All we have to do is to act quickly and silently, and the money is ours."

As he spoke he drew from his pocket something that looked like a piece of cloth, and, after shaking out the folds, he went through with some manipulations, which Bob, owing to the darkness, could not distinctly see.

The others followed his example, and when one of them stepped into plain view in front of the open door, Bob saw that his face was concealed by a bag drawn over his head.

"What in the world is the meaning of that, I wonder?" soliloquized the silent watcher,

who was utterly bewildered by these strange proceedings. "It looks suspicious, to say the least. It's a lucky thing for Dick and me that I didn't speak to them; and in order to be on the safe side—"

"Listen! listen!" suddenly exclaimed one of the intruders, in an excited whisper.

The speaker and his companions instantly became as motionless as so many blocks of wood, and Bob Howard held his breath in suspense.

He had tried to draw his gun toward him, intending to put a cartridge into each barrel, and so prepare himself for any emergency that might arise.

The rustling he made in the hay, slight as it was, reached the ears of one of the intruders and alarmed them.

"I was certain I heard something," continued the latter, in the same cautious whisper.

"No doubt you did," replied one of his companions, with some impatience in his tones. "I have heard something ever since I have been in the barn. I have heard horses stamping and the cows eating their hay."

"But I heard something else—I know I did. It was a faint, rustling sound—"

"Oh, come now! We have heard enough of that. You are altogether too chicken-hearted for this business, Benson. How will you act when you get on the plains, among those—"

"Careful! careful! That is not my name."

"Well, young Jesse James, then, if that suits you any better! But I must say that if your prototype were here, he would be ashamed of you."

"I have just as much right to take that name as you have to take the name of Wild Harry," was the spirited retort.

"I can't see it! I have always done my share of work, without any croaking; and you haven't. Mark my words! If we ever get into trouble, it will be through you, and nobody else."

"That will do, boys!" said the third member of the party, who had not spoken before. "Don't let's have any quarreling. If we are ready, let us be moving. The sooner we begin, the sooner we shall get through with it."

"I am ready," said the one who had done the most of the talking, and whose voice seemed strangely familiar to Bob. "Now, remember that this night's work is going to be a test of our courage. If we can't make it successful, we have no business to think of going out West. Stebbins and his wife are as deaf as posts, and if we move with due caution they will not know that we have been in the house until we are out and gone. If they chance to wake up—well, we all know what to do in that case."

The speaker led the way out of the barn, and he and his companions moved toward the house with stealthy footsteps, leaving Bob Howard trembling all over with excitement and alarm.

As soon as he was certain that they were out of hearing, he laid his hand on his friend's shoulder and shook him gently.

"Dick! Dick! Wake up here!" said Bob, in a suppressed whisper. "Do you hear me, Dick?"

Yes, Dick heard him, but he didn't want to wake up. He was too tired. He muttered

something in reply, and rolled over to find an easier position.

"I say, Dick, wake up here!" repeated Bob, throwing more strength and energy into his efforts. "There's robbery going on!"

"Who cares?" said Dick, drowsily. "I haven't got anything worth stealing."

"But Mr. Stebbins has," urged Bob, retaining his hold of his companion's shoulder and rolling him from side to side, in spite of the latter's efforts to shake him off. "He's got a lot of money in the house—the money that George Edwards told us about, you know—and three robbers have come here to get it. You've come to your senses at last, have you?" he added, as Dick straightened up, with an exclamation of astonishment.

Seeing that he had succeeded in making his friend understand the situation, Bob proceeded to give a hurried account of what he had seen and heard during the last few minutes, adding a piece of information that fairly stunned the listener.

"The voice of the one who had the most to say, and who seemed to be the leader of

the gang, sounded wonderfully like Arthur Wallace's," said Bob, "and he called one of his companions 'Benson!'"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Dick. "It couldn't have been Jim Benson?"

"Answer the question for yourself," replied Bob. "All I know about it is this: Whoever they are, they have been engaged in business of this kind before to-night, and when they are out on their raids, they drop their own names and answer to others. One of them, the timid one, is young Jesse James, and the leader is Wild Harry. Who the third one is, I don't know; but I would almost swear that his right name is Will Forbes."

"It can't be possible!" said Dick. "Do you suppose that any of our academy boys—Bob Howard, you have been asleep and dreamed it all!"

"Have I, though? Dare you go out of the barn with me and see for yourself? If we don't find some robbers about that house I will give in, and admit that I fell asleep without knowing it."

The answer that Bob received to this chal-

lenge was the click of Dick's gun as he opened the spring and released the barrels. He pushed a cartridge into each chamber, buckled his belt about his waist and crept toward the ladder, Bob following silently after him, and marvelling greatly all the while.

The boy who was afraid to camp all night in the woods without a fire, even though he knew that there was nothing there that could harm him, was brave enough to face a party of robbers, who would doubtless fight to the death rather than allow themselves to be captured.

Having felt their way down the ladder, the two boys went to the door and looked cautiously out of it. A single glance was enough to satisfy Dick that his companion had not been dreaming. There were three dark forms standing in the shadow of the wood-shed.

They had made good progress with their work, for just as Dick thrust his head out at the door, the shutters that protected the window swung noiselessly open, and a ninute

later the window itself was heard to slide back from its place.

"They are robbers, sure enough," whispered Dick, excitedly. "What shall we do now? Rush out there and try to take them?"

"By no means!" replied Bob, who, judging the marauders by the desperadoes that were so common in his own country, considered that the attempt would be foolhardy in the extreme. "They are armed, of course, and they would shoot us on sight. Let's drive them away. That's all we can do."

There was no time to discuss this proposition, for while Bob was speaking one of the robbers clambered through the window. The others were about to follow, when they were frightened almost out of their senses by the roar of a fowling-piece behind them, accompanied by a shower of bird-shot, which rattled harmlessly among the chips at their feet.

They stood silent and motionless for a moment, and then another report and a second charge of shot completed their discomfiture.

The two who were on the outside of the

wood-shed took to their heels in short order. The one on the inside came out of the window with such haste that he missed his footing, and measured his length on the ground, and soon all three of the robbers darted around the corner of the house and disappeared.

"There!" said Bob, with a sigh of satisfaction. "We have done one good deed if we never do another as long as we live. We have saved the old man's money, but I don't suppose we shall get 'Thank you!' for it. Let's go and shut that window."

It was a fortunate thing for the two boys that Bob thought of this, and they found it out presently.

While they were walking across the yard toward the wood-shed, a window in the main part of the building was cautiously raised, a stream of fire issued from the opening, a report, like that of a small cannon, rang out on the air, and a handful of buckshot went whistling toward the barn.

"The old fellow was prepared to defend himself, wasn't he?" said Dick. "A charge

from that blunderbuss would clean out a dozen robbers."

Then raising his voice, he called out:

"No use in wasting any more ammunition, Mr. Stebbins. They are gone."

"There's no use in wasting your breath in that fashion, either," said Bob. "He's so deaf he can hardly hear it thunder. Come back into the barn and let the window go."

"Hold on!" replied Dick. "Perhaps he will come out, so that we can explain matters to him."

"No, he won't," said Bob, earnestly. "He is frightened half to death, and he will not show his head before daylight. It would be dangerous for his most intimate friend to come near the house now, for he will stand guard at that window, and shoot at every living thing he sees, without stopping to ask questions."

It was with a good deal of reluctance that Dick consented to follow his friend's advice, for he thought it looked like a confession of guilt on their part; but he did follow it, and he afterwards learned that it was the very best thing he could have done.

If he and Bob had attempted to approach the house in order to explain matters to its terrified inmates, one or the other of them would have been killed beyond a doubt.

They retreated to the barn before Mr. Stebbins could reload his ponderous musket, felt their way to the mow, and sat down on the hay to think over the events of the night.

"When we left school this afternoon, we didn't dream of such a thing as this—did we?" said Dick, who was the first to break the silence. "I say, Bob, it's a lucky thing for Mr. Stebbins that we got lost. If we had come straight to the lake and gone on to George's cabin, there's no telling what these robbers would have done after they gained a footing in the house."

"If they didn't show more pluck in the house than they did out of it, they wouldn't have accomplished anything," replied Bob. "I didn't expect we could drive them away so easily; but they showed themselves to be perfect cowards. There's one thing that bangs me completely," added Bob, pulling off his hat and digging his fingers into his head, as

if he were trying to stir up his ideas. "Who were those fellows? That is what I want to know."

"There's something queer about that. You thought you recognized Wallace's voice, and Forbes', and you heard one of the party addressed as Benson?"

"I did, and his voice sounded like Benson's, too."

"But you don't think it was he?"

"Why, of course not," replied Bob, who, now that his excitement was over, was able to take a calmer and—as he thought—more sensible view of the situation. "There is more than one fellow in the world by the name of Benson."

But this reflection did not satisfy Bob, or Dick either.

They fell asleep while they were talking the matter over, and slumbered peacefully until daylight, when they were awakened by a series of frightful yells, and started up to find Mr. Stebbins standing in the open door.

His wrinkled face was distorted with rage,

and he held in his hands an old flint-lock musket, which he pointed straight at Bob's head.

He looked dangerous.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ANGRY MISER.

"I say!" shouted Mr. Stebbins, in a stentorian voice. "Be you gone clean deaf—you two? Come down from there, I tell you, or I'll send you to kingdom come afore you can bat your eyes."

The astonished boys lost no time in waking up. The sight of the cocked gun and the angry man's face was enough to banish sleep most effectually.

"I knowed you was here for no good the first time I seen you," continued Mr. Stebbins. "Your gun and your poles is only a blind to make folks b'lieve that you come up here to hunt and fish; but I know you. I seen you run in here after shootin' off your guns to skeer me; but I've got a gun, too, an' I know how to use it. Come down from there, I say! Come down, an' clear out!"

The boys began to understand the matter now, and Dick saw at once that it was necessary to take some precautions for the safety of himself and his friend.

The old man was so highly excited that he hardly knew what he was doing. His finger was resting on the trigger of his ancient flint-lock, and, if the weapon should be discharged by any accident, Bob Howard would never know what hurt him.

In order to avoid this danger, Dick thought it best to compel Mr. Stebbins to lower his gun, which he did by picking up his double-barrel and resting it across his knees in such a way that its muzzle was directed toward the old man's head.

"What are you about there?" yelled the latter.

He took the flint-lock down from his shoulder, sprang through the door with surprising agility, and then turned around and looked back, keeping his body concealed, and showing nothing but his eyes and two little tufts of stiff gray hair.

"Turn that we'pon t'other way," said he,

his rage giving way to alarm. "I don't like it."

"Do you suppose that we like to look into the muzzle of a cocked gun any better than you do?" demanded Dick. "Come on, Bob; let's go down there."

The boys slung their baskets on their backs, picked up their fishing-rods, and descended to the barn floor.

As they passed out into the open air, they took note of the fact that the door was riddled with buckshot. If they had stood there instead of going toward the house, to close the shutter which the robbers had left open in their hurried flight, one or the other of them would have received some of those shot in his body.

When they got out of the barn, they were surprised to find that Mr. Stebbins had beat a hasty retreat. He had taken refuge in the wood-shed, and all they could see of him was the top of his head above the window-sill.

He held his gun so that he could bring it to his shoulder very quickly if circumstances should seem to require it. Believing his posi-

tion to be impregnable, he had grown savage again.

"Now, then, clear out!" he shouted, as soon as the boys came into view. "But mind what I say—this thing ain't a-goin' to be dropped here."

"We'd rather it wouldn't be dropped here," replied Dick. "If you will put down your gun, and come out here so that we can talk to you, we shall be glad to explain matters."

"They don't need any explainin'!" snarled Mr. Stebbins. "I understand 'em already. I can see as fur into a grindstone as the next man, old as I be. Clear yourselves."

"Don't waste any more time with him," said Bob, who was utterly disgusted at the old man's obstinacy. "You might as well argue with a pig."

"But he thinks we are the ones who tried to rob him," replied Dick.

"I know it; and he will continue to think so, no matter what you say to him."

"Be you goin' to clear out, you two?" shouted the old man, in impatient tones. "I'm a'most tired of waitin' to see the last

of you; but I'll tell you ag'in that this thing ain't a-goin' to be dropped here. I won't have you prowlin' around my house no more."

"You need not worry about that," yelled Bob in reply. "You may be sure that we shall take particular pains to steer clear of you in future."

"I bet you will! I'll have you locked up so tight that you won't never try to break into any other house. Mind that!"

Having no desire to prolong an interview that could bring forth no good result, Dick and Bob made no further effort to induce the angry old man to listen to the explanation they had to offer. They turned about and walked away.

As Mr. Stebbins saw the distance between them and the house increasing, his courage all came back to him, and he began to show more of his precious anatomy above the window-sill, and to shout after them the most abusive words.

Twice he made a movement indicative of a desire to bring his flint-lock to bear on the boys; but, as often as he did so, Dick and

Bob dropped their double-barrels into the hollow of their arms, so that the muzzles covered the window, and then the old man would draw himself down out of sight.

In a few minutes the bushes that lined the shore of the lake shut the house out from their view; but it was not until a long time afterward that the yells and maledictions of the half-crazed occupant of the wood-shed ceased to ring in their ears.

This, we repeat, was the substance of the story that Bob Howard told George, while they were sitting on the bench in the cabin. The only portions of it that he left out were those relating to the supposed identity of Mr. Stebbins' nocturnal visitors.

He did not mention the name by which one of the robbers had been addressed by the one who seemed to be the leader of the trio, nor did he refer to the fact that the voices of all three of them had sounded familiar to him.

He and Dick had talked these matters over during their walk down the shore, and decided that they would say nothing about them. They were merely coincidences, and,

if they so much as hinted at them, they might be the means of placing three of their schoolmates in a most unpleasant situation.

George paid the closest attention to the story, and Dick Langdon noted, with no little astonishment, that at times an expression of intelligence would light up his countenance, and a meaning smile linger about his lips.

When Bob ceased speaking, George asked abruptly:

"You say those robbers engaged in a long conversation in your hearing. Did you recognize their voices?"

This question took Dick and Bob so completely by surprise that they could not speak; but the blank look in their faces told George all he wished to know.

"You needn't answer me if you don't want to; but I'll just tell you what's a fact," said he, striking his open palm with his clenched hand. "I'll bet a million dollars, or half I am worth, that if I felt at all revengeful—if I had any desire to punish three boys who have repeatedly gone out of their way to insult me—I could put my hands on those rob-

bers before sundown, unless they have skipped the country. What do you say to that?"

"*I* say if you know who they are, you ought to point them out to the officers of the law," answered Dick Langdon, with the utmost promptness. "Who do you think they are?"

"I don't think anything about it, Dick; I *know*. Now, let me tell you a story—a very short one."

So saying, George, in a few words, told of his accidental meeting with Wallace, Benson and Forbes at the rock beside the spring, and repeated the conversation he had overheard.

While he was speaking, he kept a close watch of his guests' faces, and he would have been blind, indeed, if he had not been able to see that they knew more about the robbers than they cared to tell.

When he had finished his story, he leaned back against the cabin and waited for one of them to say something; but Bob kept his eyes fastened on the ground, while Dick Langdon stood with his back toward the bench, and appeared to be deeply interested

in watching the motions of a fish-hawk that was slowly winging its way across the lake.

Beyond a doubt, these three boys were the possessors of a secret that was destined, at no distant day, to make a commotion in the village.

"Put your story and mine together, and what do you make of them?" continued George, who was anxious that his companions should express an opinion, in order that he might know how nearly it agreed with his own.

"I make just this of them," answered Bob. "Mr. Stebbins believes that Dick and I tried to rob him last night, and he told us more than once that he didn't intend to let the matter drop. That means that he is going to have us arrested. If he does that, it may be necessary for Dick and me, in order to protect ourselves, to make three fellows, who shall be nameless, show where they passed the hours between sunset yesterday and sunrise this morning. If he lets us alone—"

"Don't build any hopes on that," interrupted George; "for if you do you are bound

to be disappointed. He is one of the most vindictive old misers that ever lived."

"Well, as to that," said Bob, slowly, "I don't call a man vindictive because he asks the help of the law when he has been wronged."

"Neither do I; but he might have listened to your explanation."

"Well, fellows, what did we come out here for?" said Dick. "It is a most unfortunate piece of business altogether, and I wish to goodness that we were well out of it; but seeing that we are not, and that we can't settle it among ourselves, I say let's drop it and go fishing."

The others said so, too; but the first thing in order was breakfast, and that was very soon made ready.

The water in the kettle, which George had placed over the fire before he opened the door, had had plenty of time to come to the boiling point while they were sitting there on the bench, and it was but a few minutes' work to make the coffee, lay the table and place upon it some of the delicacies that were

brought up from the capacious depths of the camp-baskets.

"Now, if we only had some squirrels for George to broil over the coals, what a breakfast we would have!" exclaimed Dick.

"Don't grumble with what is set before you, young man," said Bob, sternly. "It's not polite. You can't have any broiled squirrels this morning. The time consumed in shooting and cooking them would be just so much time taken away from our fishing, and we ought to have been anchored over that bass-hole when the sun first touched the water this morning; then we would have caught some fish."

That was quite true; but still the best part of the morning had not all been lost. Hungry as they were, there were but a very few minutes devoted to breakfast.

There was no time spent in catching minnows for bait, George having been thoughtful enough to procure an ample supply the day before, and neither did it take him long to row the scow out to the bass-hole and bring it to an anchor in the proper place.

The fish were evidently as hungry as the boys had been a short half hour before, and the struggles that ensued between them and their captors were numerous and exciting. They took the bait almost as quickly as it was offered to them, and, although some succeeded in effecting their escape, the most of those that were struck were safely landed, by the aid of the folding dip-net that had found a place in Bob's basket; and by the time ten o'clock came, George's guests had caught a larger string than the one they had carried to the village with them the Saturday before.

George himself did not do much fishing. He did not believe in wasting such good things as black bass, so he caught only enough for dinner, and then sat down and watched the others.

When the fish stopped biting he drew up the anchor and pulled back to the cabin, where a great surprise awaited both him and his friends.

CHAPTER XII.

A VISIT FROM THE SHERIFF.

"THAT is as fine a string of fish as I care to take to the village," observed Dick Langdon, as George rowed away from the bass-hole; "and if you want any more you will have to catch them yourself, Mr. Bob. I'm going to spend the afternoon in the woods, shooting squirrels.

"All right!" responded Bob. "If you can see more sport in killing an innocent little animal, that has no chance for its life, than you can in having a hotly-contested battle with a black bass, go ahead. I shall do some more fishing, and I'll warrant—Hallo! Who are those men?"

George and Dick turned about on their seats, and looking toward the cabin, saw there a party of a dozen or more horsemen, who seemed to be waiting for them. George took

just one glance at them, and then resumed his work at the oars.

"Do you suppose they have come up here to hunt for fish?" continued Bob. "I don't see anything that looks like a gun or rod among them. Why, George, what makes you look so sober all on a sudden?"

"Do you recognize any of the party?" asked George, in reply.

Bob and Dick shaded their eyes with their hands, and closely scrutinized every one of the horsemen in turn, but they could not see a single familiar form among them. The distance was so great that they could not see their faces.

"They are all strangers to me," said Dick, and Bob echoed his words.

"There's where you are mistaken," said George, still tugging at the oars. "The one on that cream-colored horse is my Uncle Ruben—though what should bring him up here I don't know—and those black horses are ridden by Mr. Stebbins, and Mr. Newton the deputy sheriff.

George expected that his friends would be

surprised at this announcement, and they certainly were. Their eyes grew to twice their usual size, their faces changed color, and, after looking at each other for a moment in silence, they turned about and looked at the horsemen again.

"You have certainly seen those white ponies before," added George.

"I believe I have," said Bob. "Don't they belong to Wallace?"

"They do; and he is riding one, while Forbes is mounted on the other. That fellow who is standing near the cabin, holding his horse by the bridle, is Benson."

"Whew!" whistled Dick. "I say, Bob, we are in for it."

"So am I," said George, calmly.

"You!" exclaimed Bob. "What have you done?"

"Nothing at all. But you wait and see if my respected uncle does not exert himself to the utmost to prove something against me."

"Let him exert and welcome," said Dick. "Bob and I are the ones who must stand the

brunt of this business. Mr. Stebbins has brought the sheriff up here to arrest us, I suppose."

"Of course he has," assured George. "Didn't I tell you that he wouldn't let you alone?"

"I think that Wallace and his friends have good cheek," said Bob, who had by this time succeeded in identifying every one of the horsemen. "Their safest plan would have been to stay away from here."

"I can't agree with you there," observed Dick. "*I* think, taking everything into consideration, that the boldest course was the best, and it seems they have adopted it. More than half that party came up here out of curiosity, and it wouldn't have looked well for Wallace and the rest to remain behind."

George knew what his friends meant by these remarks; but he made no reply to them. He pulled steadily for the shore, and, when the boat had almost reached it, Bob leaned forward and said, in an earnest whisper:

"You do the talking, Dick, and I will keep a close watch of Benson. Judging by what

I heard last night, and what George told us regarding the way he acted down there at the spring, he is very timid and will be very likely to betray himself while Mr. Newton is questioning us."

Just then the voice of Mr. Stebbins, who had been gesticulating wildly ever since the boat and its occupants came into view around the point, reached their ears.

"I tell you, Newton, them's the very fellers who tried to rob me last night," he asserted. "They broke open the winder in my wood-shed, shot their guns at the house, an' then had the imperdence to go into my barn an' go to sleep in the hay; an' there's where I found 'em this morning."

At this moment the bottom of the boat grated on the sand, and Mr. Newton took the painter that Dick tossed to him, and drew the bow up on the beach.

The officer seemed to be highly amused; Uncle Ruben looked triumphant; Mr. Stebbins was furious; Wallace and Forbes tried to appear indifferent; Benson's face was as white as a sheet; and the countenances of the

others expressed nothing but interest and curiosity.

Mr. Newton, who was experienced in his calling, and had gained something more than a local reputation as a thief-taker, knew very well that Mr. Stebbins had put him on the wrong trail; but he could not make the old man think so.

As the boys sprang out of the boat, he shook them all warmly by the hand—a proceeding on his part that increased the ire of Mr. Stebbins, who called out:

"Don't tech 'em, Newton. Two on 'em is thieves, an' George Edwards ain't no better, 'cause he harbors 'em!"

"What do you say to that, boys!" inquired the officer, good-naturedly.

"I say he lies!" replied Bob, forgetting in his rage that Dick Langdon was to do all the talking.

"I know he is mistaken," said Mr. Newton, in a low tone.

"Now, look here. I ain't a-goin' to have no sich work as that," declared Mr. Stebbins. "If you've got anything to say, speak it out

so't we can all hear it. You've no business to be standin' there whisperin' to them vagabonds an' givin' 'em aid an' counsel."

"I am not giving them aid and counsel," denied the officer, with some dignity. "They stand in no need of either. If I had known that these were the boys you wanted me to arrest, I shouldn't have been fool enough to come up here."

"Oh, I know you're all ag'in me!" cried the old man, whose face was fairly black with rage. "I hain't got a friend among the hull kit of you."

"We'll not stop to discuss that point," said Mr. Newton. "What do you know about this affair, Dick? Did you camp in Mr. Stebbins' barn last night?"

"I know *all* about it," answered Dick, promptly and with emphasis.

There were two in that party who knew that these words contained a deeper meaning than the officer supposed, and there was a third who suspected it; for when Bob Howard suddenly recalled to mind the part he had set himself to perform, and began to look

around for Benson, he found that that young gentleman had sought concealment in the rear of all the horsemen, so that he could listen unobserved.

But Bob was not to be balked in any such way as that. He seated himself on the bench, where he could hear every word that passed between Dick and the sheriff, and at the same time keep a sharp eye on Benson's countenance.

"I know all about it, and I did sleep in Mr. Stebbins' barn last night," said Dick.

And then he went on to tell the story of his night's experience, just as Bob Howard had told it to George that morning.

He did not mention Benson's name; he did not say that the voices sounded familiar to him; nor did he so much as hint at his suspicions; but, nevertheless, his narrative produced a startling effect.

Benson's hand trembled so violently that he could hardly retain his hold upon the stick he was trying to cut with his knife, while the expression of indifference on Wallace's face and Forbes' gave place to a look of genuine alarm.

"They are the guilty ones, as sure as I am a foot high," said Bob Howard to himself; "but, I declare, I can hardly bring myself to believe it. Why should they want to steal the old man's money, when their fathers are so rich and give them all they want to spend?"

"What's the matter, Bob?" inquired the officer—for the boy, all unconscious of what he was doing, had brought both his hands down upon his knees with a ringing slap. "Do you wish to add anything to what Dick has told us?"

"No, sir; he has told you everything—I mean—that is to say—pretty nearly everything that happened last night."

"Suppose you tell what he left out?"

"Dick is a better talker than I am, and he will do it himself when the time comes."

"Well, Mr. Stebbins," said the sheriff, "our young friend has told a straightforward story, hasn't he?"

"Oh, 'most anybody could tell a smooth tale, if he thought he could keep himself out of the penitentiary by doing it," replied the old man, who had made several persistent

but unsuccessful attempts to interrupt the boy while he was speaking. "There hain't a word of truth in what he said, except about sleepin' in my barn.

"Do you suppose that if we had been guilty of an attempt to break into your house, we would have gone to sleep in your barn?" demanded Dick.

"That was only a blind. You wanted me to suspicion some innocent persons."

"But Dick says there were three of the robbers, and you saw only two," said Mr. Newton. "How do you account for that? Who was the other, and where did he go?"

"I reckon mebbe it was George Edwards, an' that he took himself safe home. He looks kinder guilty."

"There, now, what did I tell you, young man?" spoke up Uncle Ruben, shaking his riding whip at his astonished nephew. "Didn't I say that you had better take up with my offer and go home with me? Didn't I say that all the folks in the village suspicioned you of knowin' how all them stores got broke into an' robbed, an' that you'd be sartin' to

git yourself into trouble by livin' up here in the woods like a wild Injun—eh?"

George was so utterly bewildered by this unexpected turn of events that he could not utter a word.

He stood speechless and motionless, growing red and pale by turns, and almost any one would have said he looked guilty. Bob Howard was the first to recover himself.

"Mr. Newton," said he, earnestly, "we did not see George last night. If he had met us at the road, as he would have done if we had not got lost in the woods, we should not have been obliged to sleep in that barn."

"Uncle Ruben," said George, who had managed to get a few of his wits together, "you don't suspect me of being dishonest; and I know it as well as you do. Your object is to drive me away from this lake, under the impression that if you succeed I shall be forced to work for you for nothing; but you may as well give it up, for I will never do a hand's turn for you as long as I live."

"I've always heard," replied Uncle Ruben, running his eye over the cabin and its sur-

roundings, as if he were looking for something —"I've always heard that when thieves steal anything they hide it somewheres, most ginerally in the ground. I think it would be a good plan to s'arch the premises."

"But they didn't git my money," said Mr. Stebbins. "They only tried to get it."

"I wasn't thinkin' about you, neighbor," was Uncle Ruben's reply. "There's been a heap of stealin' an' thievin' goin' on about the village, an' if George is the one who done it, I say he had oughter suffer for it, if he is my nephew."

"But I can't search the house," said the sheriff. "I have no warrant."

"That's your own fault," rejoined Uncle Ruben. I told you, when we was down to the village, to take out a s'arch warrant the very first thing."

"And I didn't do it, because I knew I shouldn't find anything."

"Never mind the warrant, Mr. Newton," said George, whose face was red with indignation. "Come right in and go to work. But perhaps you had better let Uncle Ruben do

it. He seems very anxious to prove me guilty of something."

As he spoke, he threw open the door of the cabin and stood aside, so that the officer could enter; but the latter did not seem disposed to do anything of the kind.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TABLES TURNED.

UNCLE RUBEN EDWARDS was so highly exasperated at his nephew, and so fully determined to punish him for his refusal to live with him as a bound boy, that he had thought of nothing else during the past week, and he could think of nothing else now; consequently, he did not notice the peculiar look with which the sheriff regarded him.

Mr. Newton knew very well why it was that George's relative took so much interest in the boy's affairs; he did not believe Mr. Stebbins' story, except in so far as it was corroborated by Dick Langdon's; and he had already made up his mind that he was wasting time there, and that he would return to the village and look elsewhere for the robbers; but he did not do it, for he was nearer to obtaining a clue than he thought he was.

"'Tain't worth while to go into the shanty, seein' that there ain't no place there to hide things in," said Uncle Ruben, as he got off his horse and picked up a stout stick. "Take this here, an' poke around in the leaves, an' jest as like as not, you'll find something."

"I don't want it," answered the officer. "If you think there is any stolen property concealed about here, you had better look around and find it yourself."

This was a decided snub, but Uncle Ruben was not at all abashed by it. He took a peep into the cabin, and then went around behind it, followed by the sheriff and all his party.

Bob Howard held back, and, by the aid of some mysterious school-boy telegraphy, brought his friend Dick to his side.

"Well, Bob, isn't that a nice uncle for any decent boy to have?" said Dick. "If I were in George's place, I wouldn't acknowledge the relationship. He acts for all the world as though he wanted to find some evidence against his nephew. But what is the matter with you? Your face is a yard long."

"They're going to find something around

there," replied Bob, in an earnest whisper. "You hear me? As sure as you live, they are going to find something!"

"No!" exclaimed Dick, who knew by the expression on his friend's face that the latter had some good reason for being so positive.

"But I say they are. Look here. While you were telling your story, those three fellows acted as though they were frightened nearly out of their wits. Benson trembled like a leaf, and Wallace and Forbes were as white as ghosts. They showed their guilt so very plainly that it is a wonder to me that those around them didn't notice it."

"Perhaps they were giving all their attention to me," observed Dick. "They certainly stared at me very hard."

"But that isn't all," continued Bob. "Just the minute that Uncle Ruben, as George calls him, proposed that the premises should be searched, the appearance of those three boys changed as if by magic. They looked relieved at once, and I heard Wallace say, 'If I were Mr. Newton, I would search the shanty, warrant or no warrant. It is plain that George

can't live on nothing, and as he has no visible means of support—' What's that? Didn't I tell you that they would find something? Let's go around there."

Bob was interrupted by the sound of Uncle Ruben's voice, which came from behind the cabin. It was pitched in a high key, and there was a triumphant ring in it.

Being fully satisfied in his own mind that the man had succeeded in finding some damaging evidence against his nephew, Bob was not very much surprised at the sight that was presented to his view when he ran around the corner of the house.

A hole had been dug close under the rear wall, and near by lay a couple of open bundles that had just been taken out of it.

Uncle Ruben's face was fairly radiant. He seemed to be struggling to assume an expression of countenance suitable to the occasion, but his delight was so great that he could not possibly conceal it.

George Edwards was fairly overwhelmed with astonishment, while Wallace and his two friends looked as though a mountain

of anxiety had been removed from their minds.

Bob's sharp eyes took all these things in at a glance, and then they turned toward the sheriff.

The latter looked solemn, but he did not appear to be at all astonished. He knew that George Edwards had never put those bundles in that hole; and there were other men in the party who knew it, too.

But the question was: Who did do it?

It was answered in a very few minutes, and in a most unexpected manner.

"George, I am astonished at you!" said Uncle Ruben, drawing the back of his hand across his eyes, and wiping away the tears that would *not* come at his bidding. "Neighbor Newton, these things come from some of the stores that's been robbed."

The officer nodded his head, but said nothing.

"There's been a heap of this sort of work goin' on," continued Uncle Ruben; "an' who knows but there's something else hid away about here? Let's take a look through

the bushes, all of us, an' see if we can find anything in 'em."

Some of the party complied, moving about in a listless sort of way, and showing by all their actions that their hearts were not in the matter, while the others held the horses and awaited the result of the search in silence.

Uncle Ruben kept clear of the thicket into which he had thrown the chickens, hoping that some one would stumble upon it. Two or three men did walk through it, but they found nothing.

Then Uncle Ruben went in himself; but he, too, came out empty-handed. Beyond a doubt, some prowling fox or raccoon had been there before him and carried off the chickens.

"Well, Mr. Edwards, you don't seem to be having very good luck," said the sheriff, who was growing tired of this "spitework business," as he afterward termed it.

"No, I don't seem to find nothing—that's a fact," replied the man, as he came out of the bushes, looking rather surprised and crestfallen. "Queer, too, I must say—for my hen-roost was robbed t'other night."

While Uncle Ruben was wondering whether or not it would be safe to accuse George of having stolen and eaten the chickens, the rest of the searching party came out of the woods, one after the other.

And when they were all assembled, and were waiting for the officer to speak, Bob Howard, after holding a short consultation with Dick, stepped out where all could see him.

"Now, then, I've got the floor," said he, "and I will show you how to go to the bottom of this business in less than two minutes."

Everybody seemed to know that there was something coming now. The sheriff looked expectant, and those who had accompanied him to the cabin, merely out of curiosity, led their horses closer to the speaker and formed a complete circle around him.

As Bob uttered these words, he fastened his eyes upon Wallace and his two friends, and kept them there so long that the rest of the party began to look toward them, also.

Wallace, who showed himself to be possessed of uncommon nerve, met his gaze with-

out flinching; Forbes moved about uneasily and smiled in a sickly sort of way; and Benson, utterly unable to endure his close scrutiny, walked off as though he had no particular object in view, leading his horse by the bridle.

"Don't go away, Benson," said Bob. "You are just the fellow I want to talk to. Come back here."

"Why, Bob, you're crazy!" exclaimed Wallace. "What does Benson know about Mr. Stebbins' money? I mean—"

Wallace saw that he had made a false step, and he intended to correct it; but Bob was too quick for him.

"Who said anything about Mr. Stebbins' money?" he demanded. "That subject was dropped long ago; but Benson knows all about it, and so do you and Forbes."

The horsemen moved up closer to Bob, and exclamations of astonishment were heard on all sides. Forbes would have been glad to run away with Benson, but Wallace stood his ground manfully.

"If I know all about it, why don't you

question me instead of Benson?" he inquired, with a sneer.

"Because I don't choose to, just now. I may have a few questions to ask you, by-and-by."

"Well, I shall do as I please about answering them."

"Of course; that's your privilege. But you'll not do as you please about answering them, when you find yourself hauled up before Judge Baker. Come back here, Benson."

But Benson paid no attention to him. He did not think it would be quite safe to go back, for he knew too well what was coming. He led his horse around the corner of the cabin, and there is every reason to believe that he intended to mount him and ride away; but his purpose was defeated by Dick Langdon and George, who sprang around the opposite end of the cabin and ran along the front of it, just in time to seize the bridle of Benson's horse as the young fellow was about to swing himself into the saddle.

"Look here, Benson! You're only making a bad matter worse," warned Dick.

"Let me alone!" protested Benson, whose eyes filled with tears as fast as he could wipe them away. "I don't know anything about Mr. Stebbins' money."

"Yes, you do," said Dick, firmly. "Bob Howard and I were there, and we drove you away just as you were about to go into the house through the woodshed window. I am sorry for you; but if you think that Bob and I are going to stand still and let somebody accuse us of a crime of which you are guilty, you will find that you are mistaken."

When Dick took him by the arm and attempted to lead him behind the cabin, Benson showed a disposition to resist him, and it is probable that he would have done so if the sheriff had not put in an appearance.

The latter had been looking for something strange and unexpected to come of this morning's work, but he had little dreamed that it would be the means of putting him on the track of the burglars for whom he had been so long watching.

He knew now, as well as he knew it ten minutes later, that Benson and his two friends

had made an effort to steal Mr. Stebbins' money—that they were responsible for at least one of the burglaries that had been committed in the village—and he was astounded by the discovery; but his face did not show it.

The culprits were the sons of the wealthiest and most prominent men in the county, and, although the officer did not approve of their idle, shiftless ways, and watched their conduct with some concern, as many other good men in the village did, they were the last ones he would have suspected of any crime. He wondered what it was that had led them to it, and the next Monday he found out.

"Benson, come with me," said the officer, kindly, but firmly. "I should like to have a few words with you in private. Dick, you and George go around where the others are, and tell them that I don't want to be interrupted."

"Well, smart Alecks, what have you accomplished?" asked Wallace, as Dick and his companion joined their friend, Bob Howard.

"We kept Benson from running away," replied Dick, whose even temper was not in the least ruffled by the other's insulting tones.

"We couldn't afford to let him get out of sight, you know, because we shall need his evidence. You said last night that if you ever got into trouble, it would be through him, and I guess you hit the nail right on top of the head."

"I never said any such thing," denied Wallace, hoping by an assumption of rage, which he did not feel, to hide the alarm he *did* feel. "Now, I am sick of all this nonsense, and I want to know what you mean by it."

"You will find out all you want to know as soon as Benson has finished his confession."

"Confession!" gasped Wallace.

That was the thing of which he stood the most in fear. If Benson's courage gave way, there was no hope for them. The bare thought was enough to terrify him beyond expression.

His face was fairly livid, while Forbes could only maintain an upright position by clinging to the horn of his saddle.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE UPSHOT OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

"WHERE is Benson now?" asked Wallace, as soon as he could speak. "What did you do with him?"

"We left him on the beach with the sheriff; but I wouldn't advise you to go around there," said Dick, as Wallace handed his bridle to Forbes and moved away. "Mr. Newton desired me to say to all of you that he doesn't wish to be interrupted."

"You shut your mouth, and keep your advice until you are asked for it!" said Wallace, fiercely.

Knowing Benson as well as he did, he dared not leave him alone with the officer; so he kept on, and presently those who remained behind heard loud voices on the other side of the cabin.

An animated conversation was kept up for

a minute or two, and then the officer appeared, bringing Wallace with him. The latter was angry and excited, while the sheriff's face wore a determined look.

"Steve," said he, addressing one of the horsemen, and speaking in an authoritative tone of voice, "I shall have to ask you to take charge of this young man."

"Hello! He's been arrested," whispered Dick.

"And I ask you once more, and for the last time, to take your hands off me!" howled Wallace, trying in vain to twist his arm out of the officer's grasp. "You want to look out for me, for I'm dangerous when I'm riled."

"Arthur, if you don't behave yourself, I shall put you under close restraint," said Mr. Newton, sternly.

"You mean by that, that you will put the bracelets on me, I suppose!" yelled Wallace, who acted for all the world like a crazy boy. "You can't do it. Now, I am going to show you what Wild Harry is made of."

Before the officer could prevent it, Wallace

thrust his hand into his hip-pocket, and when he brought it out again, he brought with it an ivory-handled revolver.

The spectators looked at it with the utmost consternation depicted on their countenances, and Mr. Stebbins, uttering a cry of alarm, started up his horse, from which he had never once dismounted, and almost ran over Bob and George in his eagerness to get out of harm's way.

There is no doubt, whatever, that Wallace intended to use the weapon he had so unexpectedly produced; but fortunately for himself and all concerned, he had to deal with men who were not easily intimidated, and who did not allow their astonishment to prevent them from acting quickly and promptly.

Before Wallace could think twice, the revolver was wrenched from his grasp, and the broad-shouldered Steve, rushing upon him from behind, clasped him around the arms, pinning them securely to his side.

A moment later there were two ominous "clicks," and when Steve, in obedience to a sign from the officer, released his hold upon

the captive, the latter was powerless, his wrists being encircled by a pair of hand-cuffs.

"This is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of. I don't understand it at all," said the sheriff.

And the reason he did not understand it was because he had not yet gone to the bottom of the matter. He knew more about it before two days more had passed over his head.

"Forbes," shouted Wallace, after he had made several desperate but unsuccessful attempts to pull off the hand-cuffs, "where's your gun? Why do you stand there looking instead of helping me?"

This question very naturally suggested the idea that possibly the youth appealed to had something dangerous about him, and two or three of the party at once moved toward him, with the intention of satisfying themselves on that point.

But Forbes did not wait to be searched. The ease with which his companion had been conquered took all the courage out of him,

and he handed out his "gun"—a nickel-plated revolver—before he was asked for it.

The sheriff put it into his pocket, to keep company with the one he had taken from Wallace, and then went back to the front of the cabin to hear the rest of Benson's confession, leaving two prisoners intead of one in Steve's charge.

He did not think it necessary to put Forbes under "close restraint," for the latter was thoroughly cowed, and quite as willing to make a clean breast of the whole matter as Benson was.

All these things, which we have been so long in describing, occupied but a very short time in taking place—probably not over ten minutes.

The spectators had had but little to say, because their astonishment held them speechless. They had barely time to recover from the surprise occasioned by one startling disclosure before they were called upon to be surprised at something else.

They were all satisfied on one point, and that was that the events of the preceding

night had been the means of unearthing the thieves of whom they had so long stood in fear.

But, like Bob Howard, they could not for the life of them see why boys in their circumstances, who had indulgent parents, comfortable homes and everything in the way of benefits and amusements that reasonable boys ought to ask for, could become criminals.

When the sheriff came back, accompanied by Benson, who was crying as though he had been whipped, they stared at him very hard, in the hope of seeing something in the officer's face that would enlighten them on this point; but they were disappointed.

They could only judge of the result of his long interview with Benson by his actions. Without saying a word, he tied the bundles which Uncle Ruben had dug out of the ground, fastened them to the horn of his saddle and mounted his horse.

When he was ready to start, he said, addressing himself to George and his friends:

"Now, boys, I am going back to the village."

"Do you want us to go with you?" asked Dick.

"No, I do not," answered the officer. "I shall probably—"

At this point Uncle Ruben interrupted him. He was no less astonished than the others were by the incidents that had transpired during the last few minutes, and he was angry and disgusted, too.

He had come up there on purpose to find the chickens, which he had killed himself, in order that he might have some excuse for accusing George of robbing his hen-roost, and his failure to produce the evidence he had so carefully prepared exasperated him. It looked now as though his nephew was going to get off scot free.

"Look here, Newton," exclaimed Uncle Ruben, "ain't you goin' to arrest George, too?"

The officer replied very decidedly that he was not.

"What for?" demanded Uncle Ruben.

"Because I understand my business, and have no desire to put an innocent boy to any trouble."

"Well, it's mighty strange where my two Plymouth Rock chickens have gone to. They was wuth two dollars," whined Uncle Ruben, who thought quite as much of money as Mr. Stebbins did.

The sheriff made no reply. Addressing himself to George, he said:

"I shall probably need your services on Monday morning."

"Very good, sir," answered George. "Do you want me to go down to the village?"

"No, I will come up here. And, Dick, I shall no doubt find you and Bob at the academy if I have occasion to serve a summons on you? All right. Good-by! I am sorry that we have put you to so much trouble and anxiety."

"I am not," said Bob cheerfully. "This thing was bound to happen, sooner or later, and now it is over."

The sheriff and his party rode away, and the three boys went around to the front of the cabin and seated themselves on the bench.

"Do you know, Dick, that we had a very

narrow escape last night?" said Bob, who was the first to speak.

"Of course I do. Didn't you see that window this morning? It was full of holes, and if we had been there—"

"I wasn't thinking of that. I mean it was a lucky thing for us that we didn't try to approach the house after we drove the robbers away. While you were telling your story to the sheriff, I heard Mr. Stebbins say to a man near him that he stood guard at that window all night, ready to shoot the first one of us who showed himself."

"And he would have done it without realizing what he was about," replied George. "His fright took away all his sense. But what do you suppose the sheriff is coming up here for on Monday morning?"

That was a question that neither Dick nor Bob could answer. Like the causes that had impelled Wallace and his companions to take up stealing as a pastime, it was a mystery, and so it would remain until time unravelled it.

While they were discussing the matter, Dick Langdon caught a momentary glimpse

of something that brought him to his feet and sent him post-haste into the cabin. When he came out again, he carried his double-barrel in his hands, and his cartridge-belt was buckled about his waist.

"Have you fellows forgotten that we are hungry, and that dinner was to be served immediately?" he asked. "Now make yourselves useful as well as ornamental, while I go out and shoot a squirrel. I just saw one run up that hickory tree."

Dick moved away with stealthy footsteps, holding his gun in readiness for a shot, and Bob and George went about their work in that listless, die-away manner that boys always assume when they are compelled to do something in which they feel no interest. Their excitement had taken away their appetites.

Their tongues were busier than their hands, and as soon as Bob found an opportunity to do so, he asked George why it was that Uncle Ruben had manifested so strong a desire to get him into trouble. The latter replied by telling as much of his private history as he

cared to reveal to a boy who was almost a stranger to him, and when he ceased speaking, Bob said:

"You may have the satisfaction of knowing that from this time on you need never see him again, unless you are willing to do so. Wallace and the others will be brought to trial, of course, and you will have to appear as a witness. When you go down to the village in obedience to the summons, be sure and take all your clothes with you, for you are not coming back here to live like a wild Injun," he added with a laugh.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that our old janitor is going to leave next Monday night—he's real hateful, and the boys played so many tricks on him, that he can't stand it any longer—and you are to take his place. Dick and I have settled it."

George could hardly believe that he had heard aright. If Uncle Ruben had succeeded in proving that he was a chicken-thief, he could not have been more amazed. He saw a bright prospect opening before him.

All he asked was an opportunity to get an education, and he would answer for his own future.

"Lend me your knife long enough to open this can of milk," said Bob. "It's bigger and stronger than mine. That's the way the thing stands. You are to take care of the buildings—there is another fellow there who looks out for the grounds—ring the bell at certain hours, and see to it that the boys don't run off with it, or the ropes belonging to it, every chance they get. You'll have to report us for every violation of the rules, and take a good thrashing every time you do it. You'll have to attend to lots of things that I can't think of now, and, in return, you'll get your books and schooling free, and money enough to keep you in clothes. Professor Boyle says he thinks you are just the boy he has been looking for."

"But I don't know him," stammered George.

"No matter. I know him, and so does Dick. My father knew him well when they were boys together, and that is the reason

he sends me so far away from home to go to school."

"You are at the bottom of this, Bob—you and Dick—but I don't know how to thank you for it," said George, at length.

"Do you remember what you said to me when you brought my gun up from the bottom of the lake?" asked Bob. "You needn't try."

George thought it best to act upon this advice, for he could not find words with which to express his gratitude.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RENDEZVOUS.

GEORGE'S unexpected stroke of fortune put new life and energy into him, and he worked to such good purpose that in less than three-quarters of an hour the dinner was ready and waiting.

Neither of them had much to say, each being fully occupied with his own thoughts. George was telling himself how good he was going to be, how hard he was going to study when he was fairly installed at the academy, and had learned how to perform the duties that were required of him, while his companion was looking a little further into the future.

Bob Howard had as good a home as any boy ever had, and, unlike a good many of his age, he knew and fully appreciated the benefits of it; but it was a lonely home in some

respects, for he had no mother, and not a playmate within many miles of him. Here was a boy who had saved his life at the imminent risk of his own, who was also motherless, who had no father worth mentioning, and if he found that George, speaking in schoolboy parlance, "wore well"—if, after summering and wintering him, he became satisfied that he was as good a fellow in every respect as he seemed to be—why shouldn't he take him home with him when they had both completed the course at the academy, and make a brother of him? The house was large enough for them—if it were not, the mountain range around it was—and Bob was sure that his father would give his friend a cordial welcome.

Bob was resolved that he would think the matter over when he could devote more time to it.

"What shall we do now?" said George, breaking in on his reverie. "Dinner is ready, but Dick hasn't returned."

"We'll not waste any time in waiting for him," replied Bob. "The last time he shot he

was so far away that I could hardly hear the report of his gun. Let's eat our dinner and go back to the bass-hole. Dick won't come back as long as he can find a squirrel to shoot at, and when he does come he can help himself."

The boys did not have as good luck that afternoon as they did in the morning, for they were on the ground too early to get the evening fishing. Still, they added a few fine bass to their string; but, about the time the fish began to show a disposition to take the bait promptly, they were obliged to pull up the anchor and start for the cabin.

They found Dick sitting on the bench, picking the bones of a squirrel he had broiled over the coals on a forked stick. He had eighteen others to carry home with him.

Having a long walk before them, he and Bob decided to start for the village at once. They wanted to get through the woods before dark.

"We'll leave our surplus provisions here, so that it will not be necessary for us to bring a new supply when we come again," said

Dick, as he proceeded to pack his squirrels and some of the fish away in his basket. "Has Bob told you that you are to be janitor at the academy? All right; but remember that you are to be easy on the boys. If we are out after ten o'clock, you are to be at the gate to let us in; and you are not to report us, no matter what we do. We'll see you on Monday, I suppose, and you must tell us what the sheriff wanted of you."

George took his friends across the lake in his boat, put them on the road leading to the village, and returned to the cabin, feeling lonely, indeed, but at the same time very much elated and encouraged.

Monday morning came at last, and with it came the deputy sheriff, accompanied by two constables. They were all mounted, and one of the constables led an extra horse, which George soon learned was intended for his own use.

"This is my idea of a hunter's home," said Mr. Newton, who seemed to enjoy the view that was spread out before him. "I shouldn't mind living this way myself, if I could make a support by it."

"You would find it a dog's life," said George. "At least, I have found it so. I didn't come here from choice, and I am heartily glad that this is my last day here. How is everything in the village?"

"Oh, the excitement is intense, and the fathers of those young rogues are very indignant! I have been called everything but a decent man by them and their friends; but I was justified in arresting them, for Benson and Forbes have made a full confession. Wallace is as defiant as ever, and neither denies nor acknowledges anything. Now, George, do you know where Dungan Brook is?"

George said that he did.

"It's a wild place, I understand. Have you been there lately?"

"Not since last May, and then I caught the finest string of trout there I ever saw."

"Well," continued the officer, "there's one place in the ravine through which the brook runs, that bears a striking resemblance, in everything except grandeur and extent, to a famous valley somewhere out West, and when

some of the academy boys were botanizing there, a few years ago, they named it the Little Yosemite."

"I know right where it is," said George.

"Then take us there by the quickest and shortest route."

George closed the door of the cabin, mounted the horse that had been provided for him, and led the way around the head of the lake.

The shortest route to the place they wanted to find was a long one, and a rough one too; and, for almost the entire distance, it led through a thick wood, where every step of the way was obstructed by bushes and fallen logs, which were piled upon and across one another in every conceivable shape.

After two hours of slow and laborious riding, George dismounted, pushed aside the bushes, and gave his companions their first view of the Little Yosemite. Dungan Brook they could not see. It was so far below them that the ripple of its waters could be but faintly heard.

"As long as I have lived in this county I

never knew before that it could boast of scenery like this," said the sheriff, as he drew back from the edge of the gulf, after trying in vain to see the bottom of it. "How are we going to get down there?"

"Hitch your horses, and I will see if I can find the path I cut the last time I was here," said George. "Here it is now, and, I declare, it looks as though it had been used," he added, in a tone of surprise.

The officers smiled, but said nothing. They followed their guide, as he scrambled down the bluff, and in a few minutes more they were standing beside the brook.

"There's Le Capitan," said George, pointing to a huge rock on the other side of the stream, which rose to the height of two hundred feet without a single break or crevice.

"I recognize the captain from the description I have received of him," said the sheriff, as he drew a note-book from his pocket, and consulted a diagram that he or somebody else had drawn on one of the pages. "He is in a bad business for he is standing guard over stolen property."

The officer led the way across the brook, and around the base of the rock, to a thick cluster of bushes, in front of which he stopped long enough to light a dark lantern he had brought with him. Then he dived into the bushes, and when George and the constables followed him they could not find him.

He had disappeared in a small opening in the ground, which seemed to run back under the rock. Presently a bundle of something came sailing out, then another and another, until there was a small cartload of them piled up before the opening.

The constables examined them as fast as they came out, and found that they contained a quantity of ready-made clothing, underwear of all kinds, boxes of cigars, tobacco, jewelry, jack-knives, pistols, cutlery, buffalo robes, blankets, cloaks, and a lot of other articles too numerous to mention.

The constables opened their eyes in surprise when the sheriff came out, and told them that these were not half the goods that had been stolen. The rest had been sold to enable

the thieves to raise money enough for their Western trip.

"What were they going to do out West?" asked George.

"What do people of this stamp generally do out there?" asked the constable, in reply. "Benson and Forbes would have died of home-sickness, and Wallace would have been in the hands of a vigilance committee in less than a week. Now let's go up to head-quarters, and see what we shall find there."

After taking another look at his diagram, the sheriff moved up the ravine, closely examining the base of the bluff as he went, and when he stopped, it was in front of a little pole cabin, which was so effectually concealed by the thick shrubbery and trees that surrounded it that one might have passed within five feet of it without knowing that there was any cabin there. Having opened the door, which was formed of half a dozen saplings that fitted loosely into holes in the ground, the sheriff went in and flashed his lantern around.

"This is where they used to come to hold

their revels and plan their expeditions," said he.

Wallace and his two friends had passed the preceding Saturday there, perfecting their scheme for driving George Edwards away from the lake, and securing possession of Mr. Stebbins' money, and everything in the cabin was just as they had left it.

There were the dishes from which they had eaten their dinner, the hammocks in which they had swung while talking over their plans, and the books and papers that had helped them while away their leisure time were scattered about.

The officer picked up one of the books, and turning to the title-page, read the words, "The Life of Jesse James." Throwing it aside with an exclamation of disgust, he picked up another, which was entitled, "Wild Harry, the Black Valley Demon."

"Here is the secret of the whole matter, and I can now understand some things that I couldn't see through before," said the officer. "Those foolish boys have poisoned their minds by reading dime novels, and are anxious to

imitate the heroes of them. I see that Wallace's name is on some, and that Forbes and Benson own the others. Pick them up and be careful of them, for they will do for evidence."

George accompanied the officers to the village, not forgetting to take his clothes with him, as Bob had directed, appeared as one of the witnesses at the preliminary examination which was held that afternoon, and that night he slept at the academy, so that he could be ready to assume his duties the next morning.

The arrest and trial of the guilty boys created a greater sensation than the quiet little village of Montford had ever known before.

Their fathers exerted themselves to the utmost in their behalf; but their efforts to clear them were entirely unsuccessful, and the most they could do was to secure a mitigation of the punishment they so richly deserved.

As soon as the excitement was over, our three friends settled down to business, work-

ing hard for five days in the week, and spending every pleasant Saturday at the lake.

George Edwards proved to be an apt pupil, and very soon became one of the most popular students at the academy. At first, the boys played tricks upon him, in spite of all his caution; but George submitted so good-naturedly, and did his full duty in so manly a way, that they finally left off bothering him.

At the end of his second school year, Bob was permitted to take up his abode at a private house in the village, and, at his earnest solicitation, George consented to room with him.

They studied, worked, and played together, and it finally came to be understood between them, that, if they could possibly prevent it, they were not to allow themselves to be separated as long as they lived.

George did not know what he was bringing upon himself by consenting to this arrangement.

Having described, as rapidly as we could, the various incidents that had operated to

bring these two boys together, let us go back to where we first found them—to the day on which that telegram arrived from Arizona.

It was the last day they ever expected to spend in Montford, and it had been big with events. They had passed their examination with flying colors, the base-ball club to which they belonged had established its claim to the championship, after a hotly-contested game, and the two friends—there were only two of them now, for Dick Langdon had completed the course a year before—were in high spirits.

Having exchanged their uniforms for their ordinary clothes, and taken a run around the bases for the last time, they set out for their boarding-house.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW ONE TELEGRAM WAS RECEIVED.

BOB HOWARD and his companion had other reasons besides those of which we have spoken, for feeling at peace with themselves and all the world.

By hard work and strict attention to their books, they had succeeded in winning an enviable position in their class, and this night was to wind up their connection with the academy in a blaze of glory.

George had written an essay on "Unconscious Influence," which was a very creditable effort for a boy of his years, and Bob had been chosen, without one dissenting voice, to deliver the valedictory.

Their trunks were packed, their tickets had been purchased, and their landlady had promised to give them an early breakfast, so that they could reach the depot in time to catch

the western-bound train that passed through the village at six o'clock.

"The time draws near," said Bob, with a tragic air, as he glanced at the little clock on the mantelpiece. "In five hours we shall have made our last bow to a Montford audience. The only thing I regret is the absence of my father; but he was not at all well when I last heard from him, and he didn't feel as though he could stand the journey. By this time to-morrow, if nothing happens to delay us, we shall be hurrying to meet him as fast as steam can carry us. I tell you, George, you may make up your mind to see some fun when we get out there in that wilderness, and for once in your life you will have hunting, fishing, and horseback riding until you are heartily tired of them all. Father has a pack of splendid hounds, and it will make you laugh to see them in pursuit of an antelope or prairie wolf. When you grow weary of that sport, you can go out with a double-barrel and shoot grouse and sage-hens over as fine a brace of setters as ever drew to a scent. Trout streams are plenty, and any one who can throw the

fly can snatch out such beauties as you don't see here in the Eastern States this side of the Rangeley Lakes. There is one thing we must do, George, as soon as we can gain father's consent—we must clear up a certain mystery that hangs over those mountains."

"I have often heard you speak of it," replied George, with a smile; "but you have never told me what it is."

"If I could tell you, it wouldn't be a mystery, would it? You needn't laugh about it, for there *is* a mystery there, and in all that country there is no one who has ever been able to solve it. The Indians or some of the trappers might do it, but they won't try, for their superstition makes them timid. Several parties, composed of settlers and soldiers, and one or two scientific expeditions from Eastern colleges, have started out from our valley, declaring that they wouldn't come back until the thing was cleared up; but they have always returned, after a few weeks' absence, in a most dilapidated condition."

"There must be a good many obstacles to

be overcome," said George, "but you may count on me every time."

"All right. I shall some day put your courage to the test. Now I will tell you what I have decided to do. If my father is no worse when I reach home, I shall go to college. He wants me to do it, and I should like to carry out his wishes, although I expect to be a ranchman all my life. If he requires my presence at home, I shall remain there, and you must stay with me. I will give you a position as herdsman at good wages, and will pay you in money or sheep, or both, just as you prefer. You can make enough in a few years, by steady work and economy, to start a ranch of your own on a small scale."

"You are very kind, Bob," said George.

"No, I am not. I am only selfish. I am thinking quite as much of my own comfort and pleasure as I am of yours. I don't want to stay out there with no congenial companion to help me while away the time. It is lonely, especially in winter, when we are snowed up or confined to the house for days

at a time by those furious storms that we call 'blizzards.' And since you have no home of your own, and no father or mother, why shouldn't you go with me?"

"Wouldn't it be more agreeable for you to take your Cousin Arthur out there with you?" asked George. "I have often heard you speak of him."

"No, it wouldn't," answered Bob, quickly. "His father—Uncle Bob, after whom I was named—treated my father most shamefully, and they have not seen each other for years. Father has forgiven him, and Uncle Bob now and then writes him very friendly letters; but I am afraid of Uncle Bob, for I know that he is cunning and vindictive, and always on the lookout for a chance to work some injury to those he does not like, because my mother often told me so. I have seen him and Arthur several times, but I did not like either of them. There is too much 'Oily Gammon' about Uncle Bob, while Arthur is—Well, the less said about him the better. I wouldn't take him into my father's house under any consideration, for his presence there

would be enough to rob life of all its pleasure. I say, George!" exclaimed Bob, suddenly, "What is that on the table there by your elbow?"

George raised his arm, and, discovering the brown envelope, he picked it up and looked at it.

"Why, it is a telegram, addressed to you!" said he, handing it over to his friend, whose face had suddenly grown as pale as death.

"A telegram!" gasped Bob. "It can mean but one of two things. My father is worse, or else he is—"

Bob could say no more. With trembling hands, he tore open the dispatch, and, with one swift glance, made himself master of its contents. Then he pressed his hand to his forehead in a bewildered sort of way, reeled a moment, as if some one had dealt him a stunning blow, and, falling heavily back upon the sofa, he covered his face with his hands and burst into tears. The telegram fluttered out of his nerveless fingers.

George picked it up, and read the following fateful words:

"Your father died very suddenly this morning. Come home immediately, and telegraph me from Leavenworth when to meet you at the station.

G. H. EVANS."

We will not speak of the scene that followed. Such sorrow as this, which had come upon Bob Howard like a clap of thunder from a clear sky, is too sacred to be intruded upon, even by a sympathizing pen.

It will be enough to say that after the first overwhelming burst of grief had passed away, Bob acted more like a caged tiger than a human being. He longed to fly on the wings of the wind to his far-off home, in order that he might gaze once more upon that loved face before the darkness of the grave shut it out forever from his view.

But steam was the only power that could take him there. The next train left the village at six in the morning, and that was the one Bob had intended to take.

He ate no supper, and when the time came he began preparing himself for the evening's festivities. What a mockery they seemed to him now!

"Don't go," said George, who had tried his best to say something comforting to his almost heart-broken friend. "The professor will not expect anything of you to-night."

"I shall go and deliver my speech—that is, if I have brains enough to remember it," said Bob, quietly but firmly. "This sorrow is my own. No one in the wide world has a share in it, and you will see that I have self-control enough to take me through the exercises without detracting in the least from anybody's enjoyment."

And he kept his word.

The news of his bereavement had spread all through the village by this time, and not one of the vast audience that crowded the Academy Chapel expected to see him on the stage.

When the valedictory was announced, and the young orator appeared before the footlights, a silence that was almost oppressive fell upon the assembly. They all sympathized with the boy, and their sympathy was so intense that, like the darkness that covered the land of Egypt, it could be *felt.*

Bob's voice was husky, and trembled a little at first, but he gradually regained the mastery of himself as he proceeded, and, when he ended his peroration, the applause that followed fairly shook the building.

It was a spontaneous outburst of admiration, not for the oratorical effort of the student —which was something better than common —but for the wonderful nerve he exhibited. Few boys could have passed through such an ordeal.

Bob set out for his boarding-house as soon as he left the stage, and when George entered the room, an hour later, he was pacing the floor, with his hands buried deep in his pockets, and his chin resting on his breast. He was calmer now, and he even smiled as he gave his chum an approving slap on the back.

"You did yourself credit to-night, George," said he. "If I could write an essay like that, I should feel proud of myself. Now, go to bed, and I will have you up at five o'clock in the morning. I will lie down on the sofa when I get tired. I know how to sympathize

with you now, for I am alone in the world as you are."

"There are your uncle and your cousin," George ventured to remark.

"They are no more to me than they are to you," replied Bob. "I shall drop them a line, telling them of father's death, but beyond that, I shall have nothing to do with them. They can stay at their home in Indiana, and you and I will live on the ranch. You are all I have, and you must stick to me."

Neither of the two boys slept a wink that night. Bob walked the floor, and George lay in bed, watching him through his half-closed eyes.

At half-past five they disposed of a hasty breakfast, said "good-by" to their landlady, and to a few friends among the students who had come to the depot to see them off, and then the fast express whirled them away toward St. Louis.

Up to this time, Bob Howard's career had been rather an uneventful one; but now, capricious fate had taken him in hand, and

ordered that during the next few months his life was to be crowded full of such excitement and adventure, such perils and startling surprises, as never before fell to the lot of any boy.

He was to be given ample opportunity for the exercise of the extraordinary nerve and pluck which he had exhibited while delivering his valedictory, but with this difference:

Then, he was in the presence of friends, who would willingly have made every allowance for him, had any forbearance or consideration on their part been necessary; but hereafter he was to be surrounded by enemies, who were already plotting his ruin, and who stood ready to take every possible advantage of him.

Let us follow that other telegram to its destination, and see who some of these enemies were.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO NEW CHARACTERS.

"IF my last half-hour's experience isn't enough to disgust any one with the dry-goods business, and everything connected with it, I wouldn't say so."

Arthur Howard suspended for a moment the distasteful work of rolling up the bolts of goods with which his counter was covered, and gazed after a party of ladies who had just gone out.

While they were in the store he was all bows and smiles, struck imposing attitudes, fumbled with the watch-chain that hung across his vest, rested his white hands on the counter, so that the immense seal-ring he wore on the third finger of his left hand could be plainly seen, and tried in various other ways to make himself appear interesting in the eyes of his fair customers; but

now he frowned fiercely, and slammed the heavy bolts about as if he were in no amiable frame of mind.

He grew angry every time he looked toward the street. The day was bright and pleasant, and not too warm for comfort, and everybody in town seemed to have come out for a ride or a promenade.

"Everybody except me sees some pleasure in this world," said Mr. Arthur Howard, resuming his work. "I have to toil and slave all the time for wages that are barely enough to keep me in cigars; and, more than all, I can't look forward to anything better. I shall lead a dog's life as long as I live. If I had money I should be perfectly happy, and I would do anything in the world to get it. What did you say, sir?"

This question was addressed to one of the proprietors of the store, who leaned over the counter and said something in a tone so low that Arthur did not catch the words.

"Mr. Allen desires your presence in the office," was the reply.

The clerk's under jaw dropped, and he grew

red and pale by turns, as he left his counter and walked toward the office, where the head of the firm, a stern old gentleman, with gold eye-glasses perched on the top of his nose, sat in an easy chair waiting for him.

"Howard," said the merchant, when the clerk in obedience to a sign from his employer, had closed the door behind him, "how much do we pay you for your services?"

"Twenty-five dollars a month, sir," was the answer.

And the tone in which it was given was humble enough. The clerk was always cringing in his demeanor toward his superiors, and haughty and overbearing when in the presence of those whom he considered to be beneath him in the social scale. He was just the sort of person that tyrants are made of.

"Well, now, what I want to know is this," continued the senior partner. "How can you afford to dress as you do, and sport a watch and chain, and rings, and patent-leather shoes, on twenty-five dollars a month? I can't afford

so much finery on ten times that amount. Then, your billiards and cigars must cost you a tidy sum, and you don't get those livery horses that you drive out into the country every Sunday for nothing."

"It takes all my salary, sir," replied the clerk, pulling out his handkerchief and arranging his moustache, not because it needed arranging, but because he wanted to conceal his face from his employer.

He knew that it was as red as fire, for he could feel it burn.

"Are you sure that you don't spend more than your salary?" asked the merchant, in a very significant tone of voice.

"Oh, yes, sir! yes, sir!—quite sure!" replied Mr. Howard, with more earnestness than the occasion seemed to demand.

He wanted to add, "You surely do not suspect me of dishonesty?" but the words stuck in his throat.

"Well," said the merchant, after looking sharply at the clerk for a moment, "all I have to say is, that you can make twenty-five dollars go much further than I can. I cannot

permit so much extravagance among those in my employ, for, to say the least, it looks suspicious. So I have called you in here for the purpose of telling you that we shall have no further occasion for your services. There is the money we owe you. Good-day!"

"I am well out of that scrape," said Mr. Howard to himself, as he walked rapidly away from the store. "I have been looking for it for a long time, and I am glad it is over. They can't prove anything against me, for I have been very careful, and never took more than two dollars at a time. Of course, when the receipts ran up to two or three hundred dollars a day, so small an amount as that wouldn't be missed. Now, where shall I look for another situation? Well, I'll not think about that now. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' as Shakespeare says. I guess I'll smoke."

This soliloquy would seem to indicate that trouble sat very lightly on Mr. Howard's shoulders, and that he was not very well posted in either Shakespeare or the Bible.

It would also seem to indicate that the sus-

picions his late employer entertained regarding his honesty were well founded.

Mr. Howard did not care a snap of his finger for those suspicions; but he *did* care for the loss of his situation, for he knew that if he did not work he could get no money to spend.

He turned into a little cigar store while he was communing with himself, and when he came out, with a freshly-lighted Havana between his fingers, he saw a sight that enraged him.

An elegant top-buggy, drawn by a pair of stylish, high-stepping horses, which moved as if they were proud of the gold-mounted harness they wore, dashed along the street.

The reins were held by an exquisitely-dressed young gentleman who managed them adroitly with one hand, while with the other he saluted the friends and acquaintances he saw on the sidewalk. But there was no salute for Mr. Howard—only a barely perceptible nod of the head, which the latter pretended he did not see.

"I declare, it's enough to make one do

something desperate," thought he, as he threw his cigar spitefully into the gutter and resumed his walk. "Look at me, and then look at Coal Oil Tom! I have just seventy dollars in my pocket, less what I paid for that cigar, and no prospect of getting any more. Five years ago Tom was a hostler in a hotel stable, somewhere in Pennsylvania—a low, ignorant hostler—and all he had in the world was a little, rocky farm that he couldn't give away. But oil was discovered on that farm, and to-day Tom is worth half a million dollars. He doesn't know enough to keep him over night, but his money takes him into the best society, while I— I wish those horses would run away, and throw him out and break his neck!"

Mr. Howard stopped, and looked back at the carriage that contained the object of his envy, as if he fully expected that his amiable wish would be gratified. But the rapidly-moving trotters were kept under perfect control, and in a short time took their driver safely out of Mr. Howard's sight.

A quarter of an hour's walk brought the

clerk to his home—a little cottage in an obscure street, whose surroundings bore testimony to the poverty or shiftlessness of its occupants.

The house, as well as the fence in front of it, was sadly in need of paint; some of the blinds hung by one hinge, disclosing to the public gaze windows with broken panes and sashes heavily festooned with cobwebs; and the flower garden, once the pride of Arthur's mother, now dead and gone, had been given up to weeds, which also covered the walk that led from the gate through a narrow alley to the back door.

"This is a pretty place for a white man to call home, I must say!" said the clerk to himself, while bitterness rankled in his heart. "When I come here, after passing the fine houses on Crosby Street, where those happy young people spend every afternoon in playing croquet on the finely-kept lawns, I tell you it makes me feel wicked when I contrast their circumstances with my own. No one ever thinks of inviting me to make one of such a party, and yet I am just as good as

the best of them. It's the ready cash that determines one's position in this world. I wonder what the governor will have to say to me? Of course I shall not tell him why I was discharged."

Passing through the kitchen, where a slovenly servant girl was moving leisurely about making preparations for supper, Arthur entered the sitting-room, and found there a shabby-genteel old man, who was slowly pacing the floor. This was Arthur's father—the "Uncle Bob" after whom our hero had been named.

He was not a man to inspire confidence at the first glance, and the longer you looked at him, the less you would like him. He had an insinuating—or rather, a sneaking—air that he could not shake off, and his movements, as he trod the thread-bare carpet with his well-worn gaiters, reminded you of the stealthy actions of a fox.

He had a high and very narrow forehead, a pair of piercing gray eyes, which looked at you from under shaggy brows, and a long, thin nose—a nose that seemed formed for

thrusting itself into other people's affairs, and for finding out secrets that its owner had no business to know.

Uncle Bob, as we shall call him in this story, had once been in business for himself; but he was a gentleman of leisure now.

Following the example of more respected men, he had gone as heavily in debt as his limited credit would allow, and failed when the proper time came. But it is a dangerous thing for one to fail in business with his pockets full, unless they are *very* full, and Uncle Bob's creditors had looked so closely into his way of doing business, that he barely escaped being taken in hand by the law.

It was from this man that Arthur had inherited his great desire for wealth and his utter abhorrence of any kind of work.

"You are home early to-night," said Uncle Bob, pausing in his walk.

"Yes," was the indifferent reply. "And I shall probably be at home earlier to-morrow night. I have got my walking-papers."

"Ah!" exclaimed Uncle Bob, elevating his shaggy eyebrows. "What for?"

"Too many clerks."

"And what are you going to do now? You can't live without work."

"I know that; but I shall not look for another place until the seventy dollars I have in my pocket are gone. I am going to make believe that it is two thousand, and live like a gentleman for awhile. It is hard to be poor. You don't respect yourself and no one respects you. What is it, Jane?" he added, turning to the servant girl who just then opened the door.

"A letter for Mr. Howard," replied the girl.

"A letter?" repeated Uncle Bob, with a shade of anxiety in his tones. "Why, it's a telegram. Who in the world—"

He closed the door behind the girl, and stood with his eyes fastened on the envelope as if he hoped to find something there that would tell him where the dispatch came from and what it contained.

"Hand it over here and I will read it for you," said Arthur, after he had waited until his patience was all exhausted.

His father probably did not hear the request, or, if he did, he paid no attention to it. He seated himself in the nearest chair and tore open the envelope with the most exasperating deliberation.

Like Micawber, he had long clung firmly to the hope that something would "turn up" in his favor—that the fickle goddess who had hitherto frowned upon him would change her frowns to smiles—and he little imagined how near he was to seeing his fond dream realized.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW THE OTHER WAS RECEIVED.

"BY the piper that played before Moses!" exclaimed the telegraph operator at Bolton, when he had received and copied a message that had come over the wires all the way from some little place buried in the wilds of Arizona. "If that old villain, Bob Howard hasn't struck it rich this time, I *am* beat!"

Here the operator read the message over again to make sure that he had made no mistake in copying it, shaking his head and sighing deeply all the while, and then he put it into an envelope, which he handed over to a messenger boy who happened to enter the office at that moment.

"Wonders will never cease!" he added, as he walked up and down the office, with his hands buried deep in his pockets; "but this is a little ahead of anything I ever heard of,

and it doesn't seem possible. 'And the whole of your deceased brother's property, roughly estimated at—' Whew! I wouldn't give much for it by the time old Bob and that scapegrace son of his get through handling it. I guess that man out in Arizona couldn't have known his brother as well as we in Bolton know him. I pity that nephew, whoever he is."

The messenger boy readily found his way to the little cottage in that obscure street, of which we spoke in the last chapter, and there, as we have seen, he found the man for whom it was intended.

"G. H. Evans," said Uncle Bob, slowly reading the name that was signed to the dispatch. "Who is he?"

"Why, it is from Arizona!" exclaimed Arthur, who was looking over Uncle Bob's shoulder. "Listen to this: 'Your brother, Eben Howard, died very suddenly this morning.' Humph!" he ejaculated, walking back to his seat with an air of disgust. "They probably expect you to send money to bear his funeral expenses; but, if I were you, I

would see them— Why, father, what is the matter?"

It was no wonder that Arthur asked this question, and asked it, too, in a tone of anxiety, for Uncle Bob suddenly grew as pale as a ghost, and all the while keeping his eyes fastened upon the telegram which he held at arm's length before him.

The astonished Arthur spoke to him several times, but finding that no attention was paid to him, he jumped up and snatched the telegram. Pushing back his father, who, scarcely realizing what he was doing, tried, in a feeble way, to regain possession of the paper, Arthur read as follows:

"Your brother, Eben Howard, died very suddenly this morning. By the terms of his will, which, in accordance with his dying request, was opened at once, I find that you are appointed guardian of your nephew, Robert Howard, and that the whole of your deceased brother's property, roughly estimated at four millions of dollars is willed to you—"

Arthur gasped for breath and reeled heavily against the wall, but he quickly recovered himself and read on a few words further:

"—is willed to you, to be held in trust until the said Robert Howard is twenty-one years old, when it is to be given up to him—"

Something that sounded very much like an imprecation escaped from Arthur's lips when he came to this part of the message. His hopes were crushed to the ground in an instant, but he managed to go on with the reading:

"—less a generous sum, which you are at liberty to retain, for the faithful performance of your duties as guardian and trustee. As Mr. Howard's intimate friend and confidential adviser, I shall be glad to give you every assistance in my power. Telegraph me from Leavenworth when to meet you at the station."

When Arthur had finished the telegram, he threw it on the floor and stamped upon it, in his rage.

"What fools we are!" said he, in a voice that was rendered almost indistinct by intense passion. "Look here, old man! If you haven't taken leave of your senses, sit down and tell me why it is that you are so worked

up over this dispatch. Can't you see that these four millions will never do us any good? They are not yours to keep. They are only willed to you 'in trust,' and must be given up to Bob as soon as he becomes of age. Who ever heard of such miserable luck?"

These words seemed to call Uncle Bob back to earth, and he instantly became himself again —cool, level-headed and calculating. "This accident and flood of fortune" had upset him for the moment, but now he was able to think about it and to gloat over it without the display of any emotion whatever.

"I know that I am to hold the property in trust. But don't you see that I am to be Bob's guardian? that I am to have the management of all these millions, and the revenues that may accrue from them?" said Uncle Bob, spreading his hands over the table, as if he were in reality, as he was in imagination, fingering his nephew's big pile of gold and silver.

"How old is Bob now?" asked Arthur.

"About eighteen, I think."

"Then we shall be rich for three years?"

"Yes, and a great deal can be accomplished in that time," said his father, in a meaning tone. "Besides, there is the 'generous sum' which I shall keep to pay me for my services."

"What would you call a generous sum?"

"Well, taking into consideration the amount of property involved, and the harassing responsibilities that will probably be thrown upon me, I should say half a million."

"Hurrah for us!" shouted Arthur, "That will put us above some people who now look down on us because we can't show as much style as they do, and if I don't— Say, father, you are not going to live out there in that wild region, are you?"

"I don't see how I can help it. I must look after Bob's interests, you know."

"Can't you hire an agent, and let him look out for them?"

"I suppose I could; but I don't want to," said Uncle Bob, who had already determined upon the course he intended to pursue. "I can please myself better."

"Must I live out there, too?" inquired Arthur.

"For a while, yes. Where do you want to go?"

"I want to stay right here, and take satisfaction out of some of these people who think themselves better than I am."

"It is getting quite fashionable now for young men of means to go to college," observed Uncle Bob.

"How much does it cost?"

"That depends upon the depth of one's pocket. In your case I should say that fifteen or twenty thousand dollars would be a sufficient sum. Of course you would want to go among the best of the students, and it would take money, and plenty of it, to enable you to do that."

"Well, no college for me, if you please!" declined Arthur. "I've done my last day's work at books or anything else. Give me the money, and I will spend it in a way that will bring me some satisfaction. I will have a top-buggy and a span of steppers so fine that Coal Oil Tom's will bear no comparison

to them. How soon can we get ready to start?"

"By to-morrow night," replied Uncle Bob, promptly. "All I've got to do is to put our little property here into the hands of an agent, with orders to do the best he can with it, and then we will pack our trunks and be off. Of course I can't stay to attend to the sale myself."

"Of course not," said Arthur, looking about the poorly-furnished room with an expression of contempt in his face. "If you can't sell the place, give it away. You don't need it any longer, and it isn't worth much anyway."

If Uncle Bob had received an offer for his house and lot an hour before, he would have demanded more, and held out for the last half-dollar that he could have induced the purchaser to pay. But he felt differently now. He was as highly elated as Arthur was over his unexpected fortune, although he did not show it so plainly, and the money his property would probably bring him, if it were thrown upon the market, seemed a mere bagatelle in his eyes.

"By-the-way," said Arthur suddenly, "if anything should happen to Bob, who would inherit this property?"

"Being next of kin, it ought to come to me," replied his father—"provided there are no legal obstacles in the way," he added, as Arthur began dancing a jig in the middle of the floor. "My brother may have provided for that; but if he did not, or if Bob, after becoming of age and taking possession of the property, should die without making a will, my right to inherit would be clear and indisputable."

"I declare, it almost takes my breath away to think of it!" said Arthur, whose delight and excitement would not allow him to keep still for a moment. "I don't feel as I did when I came into this house a little while ago, I tell you. I guess I'll go out and get a cigar."

"Supper will soon be ready," said his father.

"I don't want any supper, and I shouldn't think you would either. How you can sit there and take it so coolly, passes my compre-

hension. If I did'nt stir about I should go all to pieces."

Arthur went into his room long enough to draw on a pair of kid gloves, which never saw the light except upon extra occasions, and to put under his arm the slender little cane he was accustomed to carry on his Sunday promenades, and then he went out to get his cigar.

He seemed to be treading on air, so buoyant were his spirits. He carried himself very stiffly, looking neither to the right nor left of him; and, to quote from an acquaintance he passed on the street, but whom he did not deign to notice, one would have thought by the frills he put on that he was worth at least a dollar and a half.

Contrary to his usual custom, Arthur took his way down Crosby Street, on which were located nearly all the fine residences the town could boast of, and where the gay croquet and lawn-tennis parties, some of whose members he had so often envied, were to be seen every pleasant afternoon. These parties were out in full force, but Arthur never looked toward them as he passed.

"What do I care for such people as they are?" said he to himself. "My father will soon be handling more money than they are all worth, and the allowance I know he will give me will enable me to outshine any fellow on these grounds. I wish they knew of the luck that has befallen me since I passed along this way an hour ago. I have but a short time to stay in Bolton, and before I go, I want to have the gratification of knowing that somebody envies me. Ah, here comes Wiggins! I will tell him, and that will be as good as though I posted it on the door of the town hall."

Wiggins was one of the errand boys in the store in which Arthur had formerly found employment. He had by this time learned that the clerk had been discharged, and he had lost no opportunity to spread the news.

He was full of gossip, and if there was anything going on in the town he was pretty sure to know it, and to tell it, too.

CHAPTER XIX.

BOB HEARS SOME STARTLING NEWS.

"HALLO, Art!" exclaimed the errand-boy, as soon as he came within speaking distance. "Got the sack, didn't you? You're out looking for another job, ain't you?"

"Look here, young man," said Arthur, with some dignity in his tones, "you are quite too familiar, if you did but know it. It would be becoming in you to show some respect for your betters."

"Hallo! What's come over you all at once?" cried Wiggins.

"It is true that I have left the store," continued Arthur, without replying to this question; "but I am not looking for another situation. I don't have to."

"What are you going to live on—the interest of your debts?"

"I am going to live on the interest of my money," answered Arthur, loftily. "By the death of a relative who lived out West, my father and I have come into possession of a very nice little fortune."

"How much?" asked Wiggins, incredulously.

"About four millions."

"Aw! Get out!"

"I didn't expect you to believe it, but those are the figures. So you will readily see that I am not obliged to earn my living by standing behind the counter. I've given him something to talk about," soliloquized Arthur, as he walked away with a slow and dignified step, "and in half an hour the news will be all over town."

Having provided himself with a cigar, Arthur took a long walk toward the outskirts of the town, in order to give the errand-boy time to "get in his work," as he expressed it.

And he was not a little flattered by the attention he received when he came back.

Wiggins must have labored industriously, for everybody seemed to have heard the news.

People who had seldom taken the trouble to speak to him when he was nothing but a dry-goods clerk, stopped to congratulate him on his good fortune; and among those who were the most cordial in their greeting was the tailor to whom he was indebted for the clothes he had on his back; the cigar-vender who had been confiding enough to furnish him with his Havanas; and the jeweller, who had not yet been paid for the seal-ring that adorned the third finger of his left hand.

"I tell you, money makes a big difference in the position one occupies in the world and in the estimation of those around him," said Arthur, as he bent his steps towards his cheerless home, after spending an hour in airing himself on the principal streets. "But didn't I snub some of those fellows in fine style? I wish I could stay here, so that I could snub them every day."

Time seemed to move on leaden wings, but the night and the ensuing day wore away at last, and, long before the hour for starting arrived, Arthur had packed his valise and was ready for the train.

From some hidden source, Uncle Bob had produced money enough to purchase tickets, and furnish himself and his hopeful son with brand new travelling outfits and a few articles of comfort and utility, and, when they took their seats in the drawing-room car, they were quite prepared to create a sensation among the passengers they found there. But to Arthur's disappointment, the passengers at whom he gazed through his gold eye-glasses—he needed eye-glasses about as much as he needed another ring—were not at all impressed by his fine clothes and the graceful attitudes he assumed.

They had papers and books to read, and matters of their own to think about, and some of them never once looked at him.

The only one in the car who paid any particular attention to him was a handsome, dark-haired youth, who all that day had ridden with his arms folded and his chin resting on his breast. He looked up when Arthur and his father entered, gave a start of surprise, and said, in a whisper, to his travelling companion :

"That's my Uncle Bob—if I ever saw him."

"And a very fine-looking old fellow he is, too," said the other, who would hardly have recognized in this pompous gentleman—who gazed about him as if he were monarch of all he surveyed—the Uncle Bob whom we introduced a short time ago. That fine feathers make fine birds was fully exemplified in his case. "Who is that young chap with him—your cousin Arthur?"

"I think so," replied Bob Howard—for it was he—"but I'm not sure. A good many years have passed since I last saw them, and Arthur has had plenty of time to grow out of my recollection, but Uncle Bob hasn't changed at all."

"What are they doing on this train, I wonder?" asked George Edwards.

"I'm sure I don't know. Say, George, I didn't write to Uncle Bob about my father's death, as I meant to do, and perhaps I'd better speak to him about it now, while I have the chance. Then I shall be done with him forever."

"Well, if it is an unpleasant piece of business, go about it at once, and have it off your mind," suggested George.

"It *is* unpleasant, for I don't want to speak to the man who went deliberately to work to ruin my father," said Bob, with no little bitterness in his tones. "But I will do as you say. I suppose I shall have to address him as 'Uncle Bob,' but I assure you I never would do it if my father had not always spoken of him in that way in his letters."

So saying, Bob arose and walked over to the seats that were occupied by his relatives. They looked up in surprise when the boy stopped before them, Arthur assuming a haughty stare, while his father seemed trying to remember where he had seen Bob before.

"Pardon me," said the latter. "Do I address Mr. Robert Howard, of Bolton, Indiana?"

"Bless my soul!" cried Uncle Bob, jumping to his feet and shaking his nephew's hand with both his own. "I thought I knew you—and you are my brother's son, who was

named after me, are you not? Arthur, this is the cousin, of whom you have so often heard me speak. Shake hands and be friends."

The two boys did not greet each other with the cordiality that might have been expected of relatives who had long been separated. Each knew instinctively that the other was an enemy to him. Uncle Bob saw this very plainly, and he knew that much depended on securing his nephew's good-will; but he went about it in the very best way calculated to excite his contempt.

"Sit down, Bob," said he, taking the boy by the shoulders and trying to push him into the chair he had just vacated; "sit down, and let us have a family talk. Do you know that it is a long time since Arthur and I have seen you? How you have grown, and how well you are looking! You are getting to be quite a spruce young gentleman."

"Thank you; I'll not sit down," said Bob, coldly. "I have a seat of my own in this car. I simply came here to tell you that my father was dead."

Uncle Bob drew on a long face at once,

and Arthur tried to do the same, but made a failure of it."

"Sad—very sad!" said the former. "I was greatly shocked to hear it. Very sudden, was it not?"

"Have you heard of it?" asked Bob in surprise.

"Certainly I have; and I am now on my way to Arizona to settle up his affairs. I know it is very hard, my dear boy; but try to bear up, and not look so depressed."

Bob didn't look depressed—he looked astonished and bewildered.

What business had this man, who had tried to swindle his father and cast dishonor upon his name, to have anything to do with money and property that would one day belong to himself?

"There—there surely must be some mistake," he stammered.

"There's no mistake whatever," said Arthur, glibly. "We've got it in black and white."

His father silenced him with a frown, and continued, as he thrust his hand into his breast-pocket and drew out a note-book:

"I don't wonder that you are a little surprised. I was surprised myself; but what Arthur says is quite true. My brother having every confidence in my fidelity" (Uncle Bob put a good deal of unnecessary emphasis into these words), "appointed me to act as your guardian, and to hold your property in trust for you, until you are able to take care of it yourself. The responsibility is great, but I have cheerfully accepted it. I assure you—although it is hardly necessary—that I shall do all I can to make our intercourse as guardian and ward pleasant and agreeable, and I know you will do the same. Here's the paper I want. Read that, and you will know as much about the matter as I know myself."

Bob was thunderstruck. His mind was in such confusion that he did not understand half a dozen words of this long and carefully-prepared speech. All he heard was that his uncle was his guardian, and that fairly stunned him. Was his father crazy, when he made his will? He must have been, or he never would have done this.

He took the telegraph dispatch that Uncle Bob handed him, and, having made himself master of its contents, he passed it back without saying a word and returned to his own seat.

Uncle Bob looked after him with an expression on his face that cannot be described, and then buttoning his ulster with great deliberation, he settled back in his luxurious chair with an air which seemed to say:

"Help yourself, if you can, young man."

He drew a long breath as if he felt relieved, and yet his face wore a look of anxiety. He saw that his ward was a boy of spirit—any one who looked into Bob Howard's eyes could see that—and told himself that he was bound to have trouble with him sooner or later.

Arthur must have been of the same opinion; for, after waiting a long time for his father to speak, he broke in upon his reverie by saying:

"That boy is altogether too independent to suit me. I shall have to bring him down a peg or two."

"You had better mind your own business and let him alone," said Uncle Bob, roughly, "My position will be hard enough at the best, and if you expect me to be liberal with you, you must be careful to do nothing to increase the weight of the burden I shall have to bear."

Arthur opened his eyes when he heard this, and relapsed into silence. He had made up his mind that he was going to do pretty near what he pleased with his cousin and everything that belonged to him; but now he saw that he would have to defer to his father in some things, or run the risk of having his allowance of spending money curtailed.

There had been no conversation between them regarding the amount of that allowance, but Arthur took it for granted that it was to be a liberal one.

The face that Bob Howard brought back to his companion surprised and alarmed the latter, who knew, as soon as he looked at it, that something unpleasant had happened.

He was not kept long in ignorance, for

Bob, feeling the need of sympathy, made all haste to unburden his mind.

George listened in astonishment while his friend told what had passed between him and Uncle Bob; but when his story was finished there was nothing he could say to comfort him.

"It seems that the same name is signed to both the dispatches," he ventured to remark, when he saw that Bob was waiting for him to speak. "Do you know the man?"

Yes, Bob knew him well. He was their nearest neighbor, and the first friend they made when they settled in Arizona.

"Then he is the one you want to talk to," said George. "No doubt he will be able to explain everything to your entire satisfaction."

"No, he can't," said Bob, bitterly. "He can't make me understand why my father gave his property into this man's keeping, and made him my guardian. That's a mystery that I shall never be able to see into."

"Well, this Mr. Evans can tell you more about it than anybody else, can't he?" said

George, encouragingly. "You can't gain any more insight into the matter until you see him, can you? Then all you've got to do is to wait patiently until we reach the end of our journey, when everything will be made clear to you."

It was very easy for George to give this advice; but it was by no means so easy for Bob to follow it. Besides, the latter did not believe that it lay in Mr. Evans' power to make everything clear to him.

CHAPTER XX.

A MERITED REBUKE.

UNCLE BOB would have been glad to put himself and Arthur on a friendly footing with his nephew, but the latter would not give him the opportunity.

As soon as the train stopped, he and George went into another car, and stayed there. When they reached Leavenworth, Bob telegraphed Mr. Evans, as the latter had instructed him to do, winding up the message with the following words:

"Bring two saddle-horses besides your own, and see that there is just room enough in the wagon for two persons."

"I want nothing to do with the old hypocrite," said Bob, as he and George went back to the train, "and by sending for two saddle horses I have made it possible for you and me to have a little private conversation with

Mr. Evans. Uncle Bob and Arthur will have to occupy a seat in the wagon."

When they reached Dixon Spring, which was as far as the track was laid at the time of which we write, their journey by rail was ended.

Now came a ride of a hundred and sixty miles, part of the way lying through the southwestern portion of New Mexico and the rest through Arizona.

Mr. Evans was on hand when the train stopped at Dixon Spring, and when Bob had greeted him cordially, he presented his friend, George Edwards. He paid no attention to Uncle Bob, but that gentleman was not to be put off in any such way.

He kept a sharp eye upon his nephew, and seeing him in the act of shaking hands with a roughly dressed man, who wore a brace of revolvers about his waist, he walked up and broke in upon the conversation without offering an apology for so doing, thereby committing a breach of etiquette, which, under different circumstances, would have been pretty certain to bring him into trouble.

"Have I the honor to speak to Mr. Evans?" inquired Uncle Bob, holding out his hand.

"You have," replied the owner of that name, running his eye over Uncle Bob's figure, and then over Arthur's, taking in at a glance, their fine clothes, gloves, canes, patent-leather shoes, and all their ornaments, but making no move toward accepting the proffered hand.

Like all men of his calling, he heartily despised finery of every sort, and he was suspicious of it, too. There was only one class of persons in that country who dressed in that way, and they were rascals without a single exception.

"I supposed that my nephew would introduce me," said Uncle Bob, throwing off a hint of his haughtiness and pomposity, and speaking in his ordinary tone of voice; "but as he seems to have forgotten me, I must do it myself. I am Robert Howard, at your service, the brother of the late Eben Howard, who, I believe, was—"

"Oh, why didn't you say so?" interrupted Mr. Evans. "I received your telegram, and

was looking for you when I found Bob; but I didn't suppose that *you* were Mr. Howard."

He looked inquiringly at the boy as he said this, and then he reluctantly took the outstretched hand; but he did not shake it as though he was glad to see Uncle Bob. And indeed he wasn't. He knew more of the man's history than the latter thought he did.

"Now, then," said Mr. Evans, who had no desire to prolong the interview, having already seen as much of Uncle Bob and Arthur as he cared to see, "I will bring up the wagon, and while I am gone, you can present your checks and get your trunks. We have about twenty-five miles to go to reach our camping-ground, and, if we want to get there before dark, we have no time to waste."

"Camping-ground!" repeated Arthur. "Do you mean that we must sleep out of doors?"

"Oh, no! Knowing that you were tenderfeet, I took the liberty to stop at Bob's house and get his tent."

"Why, I was under the impression that a

stage-line ran within a short distance of my brother's ranch, and that there were hotels along the way, at which we could put up at night," said Uncle Bob.

"Hotels in this country!" exclaimed Mr. Evans. "There are stations along the route, if they are what you mean; and if you want to eat soggy potatoes, green biscuit, and oleomargarine butter, and be eaten up with fleas when you go to bed, you can do it and welcome; but I won't. Well-cooked camp-fare and a bed of clean prairie-grass are good enough for me."

Mr. Evans hurried away, and when he returned a few minutes later, he was driving a span of mules, which were hitched to a light spring wagon with a canopy top.

There was one seat in the wagon, placed in the extreme forward end, so that the driver's feet hung out over the pole; and the body of the vehicle was filled with camp-equipage.

Still, there was room enough in it for Bob's trunk and George's, as well as for the valises which the others had brought with them.

"All ready!" said Mr. Evans, when all these articles had been safely stowed away. "Jump in, Mr. Howard, and keep the trail, which is as plain as the nose on your face. The boys and I will follow on horseback."

Arthur was not at all satisfied with this arrangement, and neither was his father. The former was wondering what his aristocratic acquaintances in Bolton would say if they could see him dressed in his fine clothes and perched behind a span of lazy mules; while Uncle Bob told himself that he was losing something by leaving his nephew and Mr. Evans together. He wanted an opportunity to tell his story before Bob could say anything to prejudice the man against him.

"So *that's* the man who is to act as your guardian, is it?" said Mr. Evans, as the wagon moved off. "He is the chap who borrowed money of your father to start him in business, and then failed and cheated him out of the most of it?"

"Yes; and when father came out here, in the hope of recovering the health he had lost by overwork, Uncle Bob industriously cir-

culated the report that he had run away from his creditors," added Bob, in a voice that was husky with indignation. "Father couldn't have forgotten all this, and yet he made this man my guardian, and gave him control of the property."

"No, he didn't forget it, but he forgave it," said Mr. Evans. "I know that the fierce quarrel he had with his brother was the cause of much sorrow to him; and as soon as he had paid all your Uncle Bob's debts, he went to work to heal the breach—"

"And Uncle Bob helped him; and this is the result," broke in the boy.

"That seems to be about the way the thing stands. I know what sort of a will he made, and I know, too, that it was his intention to speak to you about it when you came home this fall, and to change it, if you raised the least objection to it."

"I shouldn't have done it," said Bob, with tears in his eyes. "As it was his wish that my uncle should act in his stead, I shall submit, and be as dutiful and respectful as I can; but, unless he changes very much, I shall be

heartily glad to see the last of him. Now, let us drop the matter. I don't want to talk about it any more."

Neither did Mr. Evans. Regrets could not change the situation.

He was sorry for Bob, and he made the mental resolution that he would keep an eye on this guardian of his, and at the very first sign of tyranny or unfaithfulness, he would raise a storm about his ears that would drive him from the country.

The journey from Dixon Spring to Bob Howard's home consumed the best part of five days, and during that time Arthur and George had opportunity to learn what Western life, of which they had often read the most glowing accounts, really was.

George was delighted with it, but Arthur did not like it at all, and told himself over and over again that he would make his way back to Bolton just as soon as he could induce his father to give him money enough to take him there.

There was no fun in sleeping on the hard ground every night. The tent which he

thought ought to be devoted to the exclusive use of himself and his father, was crowded every night, all the strangers they encountered on the way (roughly-dressed, loud-talking fellows they were, whose words and actions seemed to indicate that they were spoiling for a fight) being given a hearty welcome and urged to make themselves perfectly at home; and he had so much to say about the food that was served up to him, that he finally exhausted all the patience of Mr. Evans, who one day took him to task in the following style:

"Young man," said he, shaking a piece of hardtack at Arthur, "I have traveled a good deal, spent some years in the army, associated with all sorts and kinds of people, and I have always noticed one thing—that those who never have anything worth eating at home are the very ones who growl the loudest at what is set before them when they are away from home."

Arthur would have been glad to make an angry reply to this merited rebuke, but something in the clear brown eye that was fastened

upon his own told him that it would not be quite safe to do so.

Both he and his father took the hint, and from that time forward conducted themselves like reasonable beings.

The result was just what might have been expected. Mr. Evans became more sociable and communicative, and instead of following behind the wagon, as he had formerly done, he rode beside it, patiently answering all Uncle Bob's questions and trying his best to enlighten him on every subject on which he sought information.

The latter was astonished at his knowledge, and could hardly believe his nephew when the latter told him that those rough clothes covered a Yale College graduate.

While Mr. Evans was devoting himself to the senior member of the party, Arthur was not neglected. As soon as he threw off his assumed dignity—which did not set well on him, anyway—George and Bob met him half-way, and the latter, having come to the sensible conclusion that it was useless to fight against the inevitable, went to work

to place himself on friendly terms with his cousin.

He gave him his horse when he saw that he was tired of riding in the wagon, took pains to direct his attention to all the interesting objects along the trail, and showed him his new home while they were yet ten hours' journey distant from it.

"What a grand view this is!" exclaimed Arthur, as he drew rein on the brink of a frightful precipice and gazed down into the valley below him.

He was riding Mr. Evans' horse, that gentleman having taken his seat in the wagon. Bob did not object to this arrangement now. He knew that Mr. Evans was his friend, and it mattered little what his uncle said to him.

"Yes, it's a splendid sight," said Bob, who was thinking of the lonely grave there was somewhere in that valley, and not of the beauty of the scenery. "People who have traveled among the Alps say that Switzerland has nothing that can beat it. Every foot of that valley belonged to my father."

"And if anything should happen to you

during the next three years it is quite possible that every foot of it will belong to me," said Arthur to himself.

This thought had been uppermost in his mind ever since the day that telegram was received. He had pondered upon it day and night, and he continued to ponder upon it until it led to something—something that created the greatest excitement, and came pretty near ending in a fearful tragedy.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CANYON.

THE valley toward which the three boys directed their gaze was quite ten miles long and a little more than half as wide. It was almost oval in shape, and was surrounded on all sides by rocky bluffs, which, in some places, arose to the height of nearly two thousand feet.

The base of these bluffs was lined with an almost unbroken forest of cottonwood trees, which in addition to supplying the numerous inhabitants of the valley with fuel, gave secure protection to the ranchman's sheep, that sought shelter there when the cold winter winds swept down the gorges and blocked all the trails with snow.

The valley was watered by a deep stream, which, entering at one end by a succession of lofty cascades, and running through the

verdant fields with an almost imperceptible current, finally disappeared in a cavern so dark and gloomy that it made one shudder to look at it.

Near the middle of the valley this stream widened into a lake of considerable size. It was on the bosom of this lake that Bob Howard had cast his first fly to tempt the wary trout from his hiding-place; and among the weeds and rushes that lined the further shore he had killed his first wild duck.

By the aid of a powerful field-glass which Bob had brought with him, Arthur and George were enabled to make a close examination of all the objects he pointed out to them. Something which, at the first glance, looked like a cobble-stone, turned out to be a roomy rancho; a little patch of white in the middle of one of the fields the glass showed to be an immense flock of sheep; small clumps of bushes became extensive groves of scrub oaks; things that looked no larger than a sprig of clover changed into horsemen; and the dark lines that ran across the valley in every direction took the form of

rail fences, staked and ridered, and strongly built to withstand the violence of the winter winds.

The atmosphere was so pure that the smallest object could be seen and described. George and Arthur could hardly believe that ten hours would elapse, and that they would be obliged to spend another night in camp, before they could take a nearer view of the valley.

"How are we going to get down there?" asked the former. "I hope you don't intend to lower us over these cliffs with a rope?"

"Oh, no! There's a road that leads to the bottom, but it is a long and winding one. The building of it was equal to all the labors of Hercules, and I have been told that he had some pretty difficult tasks to perform."

Arthur, who had never heard of Hercules before, would have been glad to know who he was and what he had to do, but he was ashamed to ask for information.

His companions, who seemed to know a little of everything, had more than once put him to the blush, and, rather than let them

see how ignorant he was, he maintained a discreet silence.

"My father laid it off," continued Bob, with some pride in his tones, "and not one of all the college professors who have been here has been able to make any improvement in it. Hark!" he added, a moment later, raising his forefinger in the air and turning his head to one side. "Now you are going to hear it."

There was something in Bob's tone and manner that affected his companions rather unpleasantly, awed as they were by the grandeur and sublimity of their surroundings.

They listened intently, and all they could hear was the sighing of the mountain breeze through the branches of the evergreens that lined the trail on both sides; but presently there came floating on that same breeze a sound that cannot be described—a sound that seemed to chill the blood of the two boys, who now listened to it for the first time.

It was faint, yet it could be distinctly heard. Like the noise that sometimes accompanies an

earthquake, it seemed to come from no particular direction, but filled the air all around them. It continued for a few seconds, growing neither louder nor fainter, and then suddenly ceased.

Arthur and George drew a long breath, and looked at their companion with eyes that were full of curiosity and alarm.

"What is it?" they asked, almost involuntarily sinking their voices into a whisper.

"It is the mystery of Lost River Canyon," replied Bob, solemnly. "Here's Mr. Evans. Ask him."

The boys turned about in their saddles, and saw that the wagon had come up and stopped close behind. They knew that both of its occupants had been listening to the strange sound that had just died away. Mr. Evans looked indifferent, but Uncle Bob was visibly affected.

"What is it, Mr. Evans? and where does it come from?" asked George, as he rode up beside the wagon.

"It undoubtedly has its origin somewhere in the mountains," was the reply; "but just

where it comes from, and what causes it, are questions that no one has yet been able to answer."

"What is your theory?" asked George.

"I have none."

"Why doesn't somebody go into the mountains and solve the mystery?"

"Haven't I told you over and over again that the attempt has often been made, and that nothing ever came of it?" said Bob. "I gave you to understand that there was a mystery connected with these mountains, and now you know as much about it as I do."

"Couldn't one follow up the sound, and so find its source?" inquired Uncle Bob.

"Which way did it come from?" asked Mr. Evans in reply.

Uncle Bob was obliged to confess that he didn't know.

"Neither do I know," said Mr. Evans. "No one knows, or ever will know. I suppose that there is no better hunting to be found anywhere under the folds of the Stars and Stripes than right here among these mountains, and yet you could not hire a pro-

fessional hunter or an Indian to penetrate as far into them as a week's journey would take him."

"Why not?" asked George.

"Because of his superstition. The Indians about here have a legend to the effect that this country once belonged to a giant, who, by some means or other, succeeded in getting into a row with his nearest neighbor—another giant—who overcame him in single combat, hurled him into a canyon, and put a mountain on top of him to hold him down. When we get into the valley, Bob will show you where that mountain is, and, when you see it, you will say that it really looks as though it had been thrown in there bottom up. The giant is still a prisoner, and the sound we have just heard is the heavy breathing he makes during his struggles to free himself. At the time the fight took place, there was a small stream running through the canyon; but the mountain blocked it up and made a lake of it. As the lake grew in size, the pressure became so great that the water finally broke a hole through the mountain and ran out, leaving the valley as you see it now."

"How often have we got to listen to that unearthly noise?" asked George.

"Just as often as the giant tries to throw off the mountain, and he does that regularly every three hours," replied Mr. Evans.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Arthur.

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Bob. "You will soon become so accustomed to it that you won't notice it."

"I don't suppose that such a thing was ever heard of before," observed Uncle Bob.

"This is by no means an isolated case," answered Mr. Evans. "Many strange sounds, real or imaginary, have been heard in the workings of nature's processes. Travelers tell us that on a distant island in the Bay of Bengal there exists a phenomenon known as the 'Barisal guns,' which is frequently heard at the beginning of a rain-fall, and is like the sound of the firing of a cannon. Some have decided that these sounds are atmospheric, and owe their origin to electricity. A traveler, whose name I have forgotten, writing about the villages of the Himalayas, describes exceedingly powerful noises heard in some of

the mountain peaks, to which the natives can ascribe no cause. Near one of these villages is a pond which the natives carefully shun, because frightful noises issue from its depths. Well, you have seen your new home at a distance, and now we will go down and take a nearer view of it."

Arthur scarcely closed his eyes in slumber that night. He consulted his watch at short intervals, and heard that strange noise every time it was repeated.

It sounded indescribably weird and dismal in the stillness of the night, and Arthur became so worked up over it at last, that, whenever his watch told him that the imprisoned giant was about to resume his efforts to free himself, he drew the blankets about his head and held his hands over his ears, so that he might not hear the captive's agonized breathing.

Daylight brought some of his courage back to him; but as often as the three hours drew to a close, he became visibly nervous and excited.

The travelers resumed their journey at an

early hour, and at one o'clock in the afternoon they entered the valley. The newcomers were not at all disappointed in it. It proved to be even pleasanter than it looked from the distance at which they viewed it through their field-glasses.

Arthur thought it would be a nice place to live if that giant would only give up his useless struggles and die, and the country was settled by people of his own class, so that he could have somebody to associate with.

He knew little about books, and cared less. He took no interest whatever in the hunting and fishing to which Bob and George were looking forward with so much eagerness. He was too lazy to ride on horseback for pleasure, and for the life of him he could not see how he was going to put in the time.

The ranch was much more comfortable and better furnished than the little house in which he had formerly lived, but Arthur did not at all like the appearance of those who took care of it.

They were all men, rough in dress and manners, and loud and familiar in speech, and the

greetings which they and a small army of dogs extended to Bob Howard were boisterous in the extreme.

Bob stood among them, giving one hand to be shaken by the men, stooping down now and then to caress a favorite hound or setter with the other, utterly unable to speak, but smiling all the while through the tears that would come into his eyes in spite of all he could do to keep them back, while Uncle Bob and Arthur were entirely unnoticed.

When Bob found opportunity to present them, and tell who they were, and what they had come for, they were very coldly welcomed, but George Edwards was doubled up more than once by the hearty grasps he received.

These men were neither blind nor deaf. They knew all about that provision in the will by which Uncle Bob had been brought there, and they knew, too, how dishonorably he had acted toward his brother, for Mr. Evans had given them a full history of it. Their late employer had held a high place in their estimation, and they could not bear to

have a stranger, and a man like this, step into his shoes.

"I am satisfied of one thing," said Uncle Bob, as he and Arthur took possession of the room to which they had been conducted. "We have got into a bed of thorns. Somebody has been slandering me, and these people have made up their minds to hate me, without giving me time to show them what manner of man I am. Now, Arthur, let me caution you. You have come out here intending to carry things with a high hand, but that will never do. For a while, at least, you must conduct yourself in all respects as though you had no more rights here than a casual visitor, and I will do the same. Our first hard work must be to learn something of the way in which a sheep ranch is conducted, and while we are doing that, we must make all the friends we can. After we have firmly established ourselves here, we can take the position to which we are entitled by the terms of the will."

Arthur, who had hoped to be recognized at once as one of the "bosses" of the ranch,

did not like to wait; nor was he at all pleased at the idea of playing visitor when he thought he ought to have some authority, but he saw the wisdom of the course his father had marked out for him, and reluctantly promised that he would follow it.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE IDEA SUGGESTED.

ARTHUR and his father lost no time in removing some of the travel-stains from their hands and faces, and when they had put on plainer suits of clothes and taken off some of the jewelry they had worn during their journey, they went out—Uncle Bob to find Mr. Evans, and Arthur to hunt up Bob, who had promised to show him and George the mountain under which the vanquished giant was imprisoned.

The former found Mr. Evans waiting for him in a little room in which the late owner of the ranch had transacted all his business, and which was known as the office.

There was a desk and safe there, arm-chairs in abundance, and two large book-cases—one being devoted to works on agriculture and stock-raising, while the other was filled with

histories, biographies, and works of like character—for Eben Howard, unlike his brother Robert, was a hard reader and a man of considerable attainments.

The safe was open, and piles of papers and note-books relating to the business of the ranch were scattered about over the desk.

Uncle Bob, assisted by Mr. Evans, at once went to work to make himself master of the contents of the books and papers, paying particular attention to his brother's will, of course, while the boys walked down the river-bank toward the canyon, with a score or more hunting-dogs at their heels.

Arthur, who hadn't soul enough in him to like either a dog or a horse, couldn't see the use of such a pack of mongrels, some of which looked savage enough to tear him in pieces, and he did not hesitate to say so.

"There's not a single mongrel in the whole lot," said Bob, who was not accustomed to hearing his favorites spoken of so slightingly. "These two," he added, putting his arms around a brace of glossy-coated setters, which sprang up, one on each side, and placed their

paws on his shoulders, "are the best bird-dogs I ever saw, and cannot be beaten as land and water retrievers. That fellow is a Scotch deer-hound, and he and his mates can overtake and pull down a prong-horn in a fair race. In fact, there's nothing in this country they can't catch, except the mule-rabbit—sometimes called the jack-rabbit—although it is no more a rabbit than I am, for it doesn't burrow."

"What gives it its name?" asked George.

"Its ears, which are the biggest part of the animal. I tell you they are fleet. One writer says they can run so fast that the whizzing sound they make in passing through the air can't keep up with them. The savage ones in the pack are wolf-dogs. We have about fifty of them altogether, and we couldn't get along without them. They keep the gray wolves—which are much more abundant in the mountains than we wish they were—from killing off the sheep.

While Bob was describing the characteristics of the different members of the pack, and relating some interesting hunting stories,

of which they were the heroes, he and his companions were walking slowly along the bank of the river, which was as smooth as a mirror and as black as ink; but its color was owing to the nature of the soil through which it flowed, for, when Bob dipped some of it up in his drinking-cup, they found that it was as clear as crystal.

Boy-like, they amused themselves by skipping stones over its glassy surface, and finally, Arthur threw in a stick and tried to induce one of the retrievers to go in and bring it out; but the dog only dropped his head and tail, and moved further away from the bank.

"You can't make them go into the water this side of the lake," said Bob, with a laugh. "You can't even make them wet their fore-feet, unless you take hold of them and push them in."

"Why not?" inquired Arthur.

"Because they have been whipped for it too many times. I tell you some of them cost a lot of money, and they are too valuable to be lost. You may not think so, but if the best swimmer in the pack should ven-

ture as far out into the water as you threw that stick, he would never come ashore again."

"Where would he go?"

"Down into the bowels of the earth, if that's where the river goes, and the Indians say it is. If you don't believe it, just look there."

At this moment the three boys emerged from a little grove of scrub-oaks, which lined the bank of the river for a hundred yards or more. It was one of Bob's favorite resorts. He always kept a hammock swung there when he was at home, and during the hot days in summer, when the rays of the sun beat down into the valley with merciless fury, and the panting sheep sought refuge in the cottonwoods, and all nature seemed gasping for breath, Bob would take possession of that hammock, and while away the sultry hours with some interesting book, or swing himself to sleep, lulled by the drone of insect life, with which the branches above him were filled.

As Bob spoke, he pointed toward the lower end of the valley, which was not more than

five hundred yards distant. The boys looked, and an exclamation of amazement burst from their lips.

"Why, where does the river go?" cried Arthur, as soon as he could speak.

"It goes into that hole, of course," replied Bob. "And look here. Do you see those two cracks that run diagonally up the bluff each side of the hole? They show the shape and size of the mountain that the victorious giant threw upon his foe to keep him down."

"He must have thrown it into the canyon with force enough to split it," observed George; "for I can see a third crack running up the cliff from the top of the hole."

The "hole" to which the boys referred appeared, at first glance, to be the mouth of an enormous cave, but it was not so in reality. The "crack," to which George directed the attention of his companions, pointed out the position of a canyon—a very narrow one, to be sure, for, if the boys could have contrived any way to get to the top of the cliff, they would have found that they could almost jump across it.

The other two "cracks" were simply wide and deep fissures, which had been cut in the face of the cliff by the action of the elements, but still the space between them did look wonderfully like a mountain turned bottom side up.

The mouth of the canyon did not seem to be so very large, after they came to look at it awhile, and Bob's companions were much surprised when he told them that, according to his father's measurements, it was four hundred feet wide, and more than half as high.

It was shrouded in an impenetrable darkness, and not a sound came forth from its depths. Swiftly and silently the river sped on its way, and so smooth and deep was its channel, so free from hidden rocks and every other obstruction, that there was not even the smallest ripple on its surface.

"I'll tell you what's a fact," said George, who had been awed into silence by the terrific grandeur of the scene. "If I had just half a grain more of superstition, I could put full faith in that Indian legend."

"His story fits the place pretty well," an-

swered Bob, "and in making it up he did better than any white man can do—he accounted for everything in a way that was perfectly satisfactory to himself. How do you suppose he knew that there was a time when this valley was all under water?"

"He didn't know it," replied George. "He only guessed it."

"And geology bears him out in his guess," said Bob. "If you are persevering and enduring enough to climb about half-way up some of these cliffs—as a party of Eastern college students did a few years ago—you will find shells that were left there when the water receded."

"If a fellow got into this current, he wouldn't have much show for his life, would he?" said Arthur, who marveled greatly at the rapidity with which the sticks he threw into the water disappeared in the black mouth of the canyon.

"He might as well be in the rapids at Niagara Falls," answered Bob. "Now, while I think of it, I want to give you two a word of caution and advice: The lake and the

river above it, as far up as the falls, are perfectly safe for boating and bathing, but this end of the stream will be the death of the first person who ventures upon it, I don't care how good a boatman he may be. So, when you go out on the river, remember that constant vigilance is the price of your life; and do not, under any circumstances, allow the current to carry your boat below that big cottonwood you see up there on the opposite bank."

Having taken a good look at the canyon, the boys bent their steps toward the rancho. As they were passing through the grove, they met a roughly-dressed but intelligent-looking man, who greeted Bob cordially, and was introduced to George and Arthur as Mr. Jacobs, the superintendent.

He had had full charge of the ranch ever since it was started, and that he cherished a deep-rooted affection for his late employer, and anything but kindly feelings for those who had come there to take his place, was made very plain by his actions.

He greeted Arthur coolly, and did not offer to shake hands with him, but when he spoke

to Bob of his father the tears came into his eyes.

After telling the boy how glad he was to see him again, and how deeply he sympathized with him in the great loss he had sustained, he began talking about the affairs of the ranch. At length he said abruptly:

"By-the-way, Sam has come back again."

"He has!" exclaimed Bob, in a tone of disgust. "What does he want?"

"He wants a job of herding sheep," answered the superintendent.

"Well, he can't have it! We don't want any such men as he is. I thought my father told him never to show his face about here again."

"So he did, but Sam knows that your father is not here now to drive him away."

"That doesn't make any difference. I am here, and my father's wishes shall be respected. This Sam is a bad fellow," said Bob, turning to his companions. "He and three other cowboys once rode into Dixon Springs and began shooting right and left at everybody they saw on the streets."

"What did they do that for?" asked George.

"They did it out of pure bravado—nothing else—for the citizens hadn't done anything to them."

"Why didn't they arrest them?" inquired Arthur.

"Arrest them!" repeated Bob, smiling at Mr. Jacobs, who smiled in return. "They couldn't, and besides that isn't the way things are done in this country. The citizens returned the fire, killed two of the cowboys and captured another, whom they hanged to the nearest tree. Sam was the only one who escaped. Of course father discharged him at once, and Sam sent him word that he was waiting for a chance to take vengeance on him. Now he has the impudence to come back here and ask for a job. Kick him off the ranch, Mr. Jacobs."

"I don't think it would be quite safe to attempt that, Bob," said the superintendent. "Sam's temper is rather uncertain, and he is very fond of using his revolver; but, if you say so, I'll not give him work."

"I do say so, certainly. I don't want him around."

"All right. And I say, Bob," added the superintendent, in a lower tone, "we can't get rid of him until he chooses to go, and, while he is hanging about here, I would be a little careful of myself, if I were in your place. Sam is treacherous and vindictive, and there is no telling what he may make up his mind to do."

Mr. Jacobs went off about his business, and the three boys kept on to the ranch. When they reached it, Bob and George went to their room to overhaul their fishing-tackle, preparatory to a day's sport on the lake, while Arthur lingered on the porch. He wanted to see Sam.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OFF FOR CAMP.

"I THINK Bob is taking a good deal upon himself when he presumes to say who shall be employed on this ranch, and who shall not," said Arthur to himself. "He has no right to open his head. My father is boss here now, and Bob and Mr. Jacobs will find it out before they are many days older. I wonder if that's Sam?"

While these thoughts were passing through Arthur's mind, he was walking slowly along the porch. As he turned the corner of the building, he saw a broad-shouldered, smooth-faced young fellow, leaning against a door-casing, and talking with somebody in the kitchen.

He did not look like one who would risk his life by raiding a town of a thousand inhabitants, "just for the fun of the thing;"

but still, there was something about him which told Arthur that he was the man he wanted to see.

The earnest manner in which Bob had cautioned him and George Edwards to beware of the current in the river, and the superintendent's words of warning, had suggested an idea to Arthur, and it had suddenly occurred to him that Sam would be just the man to assist him in carrying it into execution.

"Bob and George are going over to the other side of the lake to-morrow, to spend two or three days in camp," he had said to himself. "And if, while they are going up the river, their oars should break and their boat should float down into the current, why, then—"

He did not follow out this train of thought, for it frightened him; but it was easy enough to tell what he looked forward to.

As Arthur approached, the smooth-faced young fellow bowed to him very civilly; and that was more respect than any other person about the ranch had yet shown him.

All those to whom he and his father had been introduced seemed to look upon them as interlopers, and would not even shake hands with them; but this man was polite, if he was a desperado.

"Are you Sam?" asked Arthur.

"That's what they call me, when they tell me that dinner is ready," was the simple reply.

"You are one of the men who raided Dixon Springs a while ago, I believe?" continued Arthur, who saw that Sam was waiting to hear what he had to say next.

The man replied that he was, and he did not appear to be at all ashamed of it either. On the contrary, one would have thought, from the way he answered the question, that he was rather proud of his exploit.

"What did you do it for?" Arthur wanted to know.

"Oh, just to see what we could make out of it. A fellow needs some sort of excitement to stir up his blood once in a while, you know."

Arthur walked toward the farther end of

the porch, and Sam who showed himself to be quite willing to continue the conversation, turned away from the door and went with him.

"I am Arthur Howard," said the youth, as soon as they were out of earshot of the man in the kitchen.

"So I supposed. You and your father have come here to take charge of the ranch, haven't you? Well, I will tell you, for your satisfaction, that you are not wanted here."

"I know it! I has been made very plain to me since my arrival, about three hours ago. But I don't see how these men are going to help themselves. The estate is willed to my father, to be held in trust until my cousin Bob is twenty-one years of age, and we are going to stay and run things to suit ourselves—that's all there is about *that!* You are not wanted here, either, if you only knew it. Bob says you shan't have employment on the ranch."

"He does, does he?" said Sam, his eyes flashing with anger. "He wants to be care-

ful. If he knows when he is well off, he will have little to say about me. I'll pitch him into the river and let the current take him down to the Lost Canyon, the first thing he knows."

"He told Mr. Jacobs, in my hearing, that he wouldn't have any such man as you on the place," declared Arthur. "He said that the fact that his father wasn't here to drive you away, wouldn't make any difference. He doesn't want you around."

Sam looked mad, but said nothing.

"But neither Bob nor Mr. Jacobs has a word to say in regard to the way this ranch shall be conducted," added Arthur. "My father is the head man, now, and they will find that he knows how to assert his authority, too. You look like a good fellow, and I don't see why you shouldn't stay here if you want to."

"I am good enough to those who treat me well," answered Sam. "I stand by those who use me right, and serve them in any way I can, but anybody who riles me wants to give me plenty of elbow-room. Your father would

step into quite a nice little property if Bob was only out of the way, wouldn't he?" added Sam, abruptly.

This was the beginning of a long conversation between these two worthies; but we need not stop to repeat it, for the results of it will speedily be developed. It will be enough to say that when the conference was ended, Sam walked off with the assurance that he should have employment on the ranch as long as he cared to stay there, while Arthur went into the house and made his way to his room, taking with him a face that was pale with excitement and alarm.

"I didn't suggest it," thought he, laying his hand on his heart, which thumped loudly against his ribs. "Sam proposed it himself. He takes all the risk. But if it should ever be found out—great Scott! I wish I hadn't given my consent to it."

Arthur paced up and down the floor, wringing his hands, and giving other indications of a very agitated state of mind; but he made no effort whatever to undo the wrong to which he was a silent but willing accessory.

He was so terribly frightened, and trembled so violently in every limb, that he dared not go to supper, pleading a headache as an excuse for his non-appearance. He went to bed at dark, but not to sleep. He lay there, tossing restlessly about, until he was called up to witness a scene the memory of which went with him to his dying day.

Meanwhile, Bob and George were busy with their hunting and fishing outfits—wiping out rifles and shotguns, critically examining flies and leaders, and making all the other preparations necessary for their sojourn in camp.

The only weapon that Bob intended to take with him was a three-barreled Baker gun (two shot barrels, with a rifle barrel underneath), that had once belonged to his father; while George was to use the little fowling-piece he had brought up from the bottom of the lake, and a heavy, muzzle-loading rifle that had bowled over more than one lordly elk on his native heath.

Bob had spent an hour or more in loading shells, and, when he got through, the Creed-

moor cartridge-case he placed upon the table was about as heavy a weight as he cared to lift.

"Why, Bob, what makes you take so much ammunition?" asked George, casting aside a frayed leader that had parted while he was testing its strength. "We can't use it all up in two days. One would think that we were going off on a regular campaign."

"So we are. We shall have need of every cartridge in this case before we come back," replied Bob, little dreaming how true were the words he uttered. "I wish we could take a couple of the wolf hounds with us. We shall be almost certain to catch a wolf in the valley, and I should like to have you see how easily the dogs could overtake and pull him down. But by the time we get the tent and all our provisions and a brace of setters crowded into the boat, it will be pretty well loaded, I tell you. Now, if Dick Langdon were only here to go with us, we would have a time of it, wouldn't we? By-the-way, George, we must write to him as soon as we come back."

Poor Bob was destined to "have a time of it," as it was, and on more than one occasion he told himself that he and George would never live to write a letter to Dick Langdon.

As the boys intended to make an early start, they made all the preparations they could that night, so that they would not be delayed in the morning.

Bob gave his orders to the cook, who promised that they should not suffer for the want of something to eat while they were in camp; and after supper the skiff was hauled from its moorings at the boat-house, and made fast to a tree on the bank, in front of the ranch.

The little tent, which had sheltered Bob and his companions during the journey from Dixon Springs, was put into it, together with a goodly supply of canned goods—enough to last them a month, George said—and then the two setters that Bob intended to take with him were separated from the rest of the pack and shut up in the kennel, so that they could be found when wanted.

After that the two boys went to bed and slept the sleep of the innocent and healthy,

while Arthur, tormented by his fears, rolled uneasily about on his couch, utterly unable to close his eyes in slumber.

Bob was up at the first peep of day, and in a very few minutes he and George were ready for the start. As soon as they were dressed, they made their way to the kitchen, and there they found the cook and a cup of hot coffee waiting for them. One of the tables was loaded with the bread, pies and cookies that had been baked for them the evening before.

"There isn't room enough in the skiff for all that provender," said George, who was fairly astonished.

"It's got to go in," replied Bob. "My schoolboy appetite clings to me yet, and I never go into camp without plenty to eat. If the fish don't bite, we've got a side of bacon and a whole ham to fall back on."

Having eaten breakfast and packed the bread, pies and cookies away in baskets which the cook brought out of the storeroom, they bade the latter good-by and left the ranch.

"Look out for the current, boys," said the

man, as he stood in the door watching them. "There must have been a heavy fall of rain somewhere in the mountains yesterday, for the river is just a-booming this morning."

"All right, Ike," replied Bob, cheerfully, "I know too much about this stream to take any risks."

Notwithstanding George's prediction, there proved to be room enough in the skiff for all the baskets, as well as for the two setters and everything else they had to take with them.

After the guns and fishing-rods had been put in, and Bob had satisfied himself that nothing had been forgotten, he cast off the painter, hauled the boat broadside to the bank, and motioned to George to jump in. The latter looked dubiously at the water and hesitated.

"Hadn't we better pull the skiff up the river a little before we get in?" said he. "This current runs like lightning, and I am afraid we can't stem it."

"Don't be uneasy," assured Bob. "There's not the least danger. I have many a time

pulled this boat from this landing alone against a worse current than this. We are perfectly safe as long as we don't allow ourselves to be carried below that big cottonwood you see over there. If we do that, we are doomed."

George's fears were by no means set at rest; but, nevertheless, he got into the boat. When he had shipped his oar, Bob threw in the painter and jumped in after him, pushing the skiff away from the bank as he did so. A second later the current caught the bow of the little craft, which, in spite of all George could do to prevent it, swung around as if she had been hung on a pivot, and started with railroad speed toward the black mouth of the canyon, which seemed to yawn close in front of them.

"Steady! There is no danger," said Bob, encouragingly, as his companion suddenly faced about on his seat, revealing a face that was as pale as death itself. "You back water strong, while I give way."

The struggle was destined to end most disastrously.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TERRORS OF THE CANYON.

"DON'T stop to look behind you, but back water the best you know how," said Bob, seeing that his companion now and then ceased his exertions, and faced about on his seat to gaze at the canyon. "A few strong, steady strokes will put us all right."

George dropped his oar into the water again, and pushed it from him with all his strength, while Bob exerted himself to the utmost to turn the boat around with the bow up stream.

For a long time the contest seemed doubtful, but gradually the skiff began to turn, and George was beginning to take heart again, when suddenly he heard an ominous snap behind him, followed by a cry of alarm from Bob.

The cold chills crept all over him. With

an indescribable feeling of terror, he turned quickly about, and saw his companion holding the stump of his oar in his hands, while his eyes were riveted on the blade, which was floating off with the current.

The two boys looked at each other in silence, and then they looked toward the mouth of the canyon.

"We are the victims of treachery, George," said Bob, as soon as he could speak. "Somebody removed this leather, sawed the oar half in two, and then put the leather back again, just as it was before. Give me your oar. If I can keep her broadside to the stream, perhaps the current will throw us against the bank."

He did not speak nor act like a boy who stood in momentary fear of a violent death. His face was very pale, but his voice and his hands were steady, and his words were uttered with the greatest calmness and deliberation. He was as cool, apparently, as he was while scudding before the gale in Dick Langdon's water-logged canoe.

George, on the contrary, was almost par-

alyzed with terror. His hands trembled violently, and while he was trying to unship his oar, in order to pass it back to his companion, it slipped from his grasp and fell into the water, and although they both made such frantic efforts to recover it that they came within a hair's breadth of capsizing the heavily-loaded skiff, it floated quickly out of their reach, carrying with it the last particle of their courage and all their hopes of escape.

Being left at the mercy of the current, the skiff gradually veered around, until her bow pointed down stream, and once more started with terrific speed toward the yawning mouth of the canyon.

"It's all up with us, George," said Bob, still speaking with wonderful calmness. "No power on earth can save us now from going into that canyon. What are you going to do?" he added, as George suddenly arose to his feet and began pulling off his coat.

"I am not going under without making the best fight I can," replied George, in desperation. "I am going to see if I can tow the boat to the bank."

"Sit down!" said Bob, earnestly, at the same time seizing his friend, and pulling him back into his seat. "Are you tired of life? You couldn't stem this current for an instant. It will be time enough for us to take to the water when the boat is smashed on the rocks in the canyon."

The boys were so completely stunned by their fearful peril, that they had been blind and deaf to everything else; but now they turned their eyes toward the shore, and saw that there was a terrible commotion there.

When Ike saw the oar break in Bob's hands, he had raised his voice in frantic appeals for help, and soon succeeded in arousing all the inmates of the ranch.

There were a dozen or more of them, all stalwart, courageous men, who would have risked their lives any day to save Bob Howard.

But what could they do but stand helplessly there on the bank and see the boat and its terrified occupants disappear in the canyon?

Some seemed to be urging one thing, and

some another—all except Uncle Bob and Arthur.

The former, who was of about as much use in an emergency as a wooden man would have been, walked aimlessly up and down the porch, calling loudly upon the herdsmen to do something and be quick about it, while Arthur stood off by himself and gazed at the flying boat as if he were fascinated.

The only ones who did not seem to lose their heads altogether were the superintendent and Mr. Evans. As they ran swiftly along the bank to keep pace with the boat, Bob saw that they were knotting together a couple of long lariats.

"That's our only chance, and it is a very slim one," said he. "If we can catch that rope when it is thrown to us, and they try to pull us up against this current, they will draw the boat under."

A moment later, a clear strong voice was heard above the excited gabble of the terror-stricken herdsmen.

"Silence!" it cried. "I want to make those boys hear me. Bob, stand by to catch this

lasso, and we will haul you ashore. Are you all ready?"

"Let it come!" shouted Bob in reply.

In an instant the herdsmen became silent and expectant. Mr. Jacobs swung the coiled lariat around his head a few times and then launched it out over the water. Anxious eyes watched it as it flew through the air—not in a direct line for the boat, but several feet in advance of it.

"It's going wild!" cried George, in dismay.

"Don't be alarmed," was Bob's encouraging response. "The current will take us under it."

And so it proved. The lariat fell squarely across the middle of the boat, and the two boys threw themselves upon it and held fast to it.

A wild cheer burst from the men on shore, and was echoed by George Edwards, who now looked upon their rescue as a thing beyond a doubt. But Bob did not cheer, for he knew that the worst was yet to come.

The lariat was slipping through his fingers

in spite of all he could do to prevent it; so he took a turn with it around the nearest thwart, and looked up to see what Mr. Jacobs was doing.

He and Mr. Evans who held only about four feet of the other end of the lariat in their hands, were running at the top of their speed toward the grove, evidently with the intention of using one of the trees as a snubbing-post.

"On shore, there," shouted Bob, whose excitement was greater than it had been at any time since his oar broke in his hands. "Make another lariat fast to your end, so that you can give us plenty of slack when the strain comes. If we don't have a good deal of slack the current will certainly carry us under, unless something breaks.

"All right!" shouted Mr. Jacobs. "Hold fast to your end, and we will bring you ashore safe and sound."

He turned and said something to one of the herdsmen, who darted off toward the ranch. When Bob saw that he gave up all hope.

"It's no use, old fellow," said he despairingly. "If that man must go to the house for another lariat before they can give us any more rope, we might as well make up our minds that we've got to go into that canyon. As this is the last chance, I shall have to bid you good-by. I'll say—"

Just then came the strain which Bob so much dreaded. The line was suddenly whipped up out of the water and drawn as tight as a bow-string, the spray flying from it in a perfect shower.

The stern of the skiff was jerked violently around toward the bank; but, instead of swinging in, as everybody hoped and believed she would, she careened until the water came in over the gunwale, and she seemed to be on the very point of capsizing.

The boys threw themselves as far as they could over the opposite gunwale to right her; but just then there was a loud crash, the line was torn from their grasp, and Bob and his companion recovered themselves just in time to see the thwart, to which the lariat had

been made fast, fly out of the boat and land in the water twenty feet astern.

The men on shore stood aghast, and the boys clutched the gunwales of the boat, which, after rocking from side to side for a moment or two with the greatest violence, finally came to an even keel, and shot toward the canyon with accelerated speed.

It was too late now to do anything more. Escape was impossible, and even George had given up all hope of it, and nerved himself to meet his fate. He and Bob had just time to take one short farewell glance at their agonized friends on shore, and then the boat was swept into the canyon, and darkness, impenetrable darkness, closed about them!

No pen can describe the anguish of mind experienced by these two boys as they sat there on the bottom of their boat, clinging to the gunwales with a death-grip, holding their breath in suspense, and waiting for their frail craft to be smashed into kindling wood against some unseen obstruction.

The wind whistled past their ears, and

deeper and blacker grew the darkness of the canyon as their boat sped on its way.

There was no sound heard save the rush of the water against the bank on either hand, but the speed with which they were moving was simply appalling.

Believing that a recumbent position was safer than an upright one—as the darkness, was so intense that it seemed as though the walls and roof of the canyon must be within easy reach of his head—Bob threw himself backward, and, with his head resting on the tent and his eyes directed toward the top of the canyon, awaited the issue of events with a calmness that surprised himself.

Now and then a little patch of light, far above him, would shoot by with such surprising swiftness that his hair would fairly stand on end, and he would clutch the sides of the boat with a firmer grip, and wonder how much longer this wild ride must continue, and how long it would be before the catastrophe would come.

The slightest obstruction in their course—a bush leaning over the water and striking the

bow of their boat, and turning it from its course by so much as a hair's breadth—would have ended all this suspense and anxiety in an instant of time.

But there was no bush nor anything else in their way. The channel was as smooth and deep here as it was in the valley they had left—how long ago? Was it an hour or a day? Bob did not know, for he could take no note of the flight of time.

The interior of the earth must be a long way off, he thought; and that he was drawing nearer to it every minute seemed probable, for these little patches of light he had noticed a while back were no longer to be seen. Above, around and beneath him was darkness.

He could not even see the water by which he and his companion were borne along. He wasn't certain that he had a companion in his misery, for he had not heard anything from George since they entered the canyon.

He was about to pronounce his name, when a blinding glare of light shot down upon him so suddenly that it frightened him. Was he

awake or dreaming? He raised himself to a sitting posture and looked about him.

Behind him was a black opening between the mountains, looking exactly like the one on the other side of the range, and in front and on each side of him was a broad and fertile valley, through which the boat was flying with undiminished speed.

Bob rubbed his eyes and looked again; and at the same moment, George Edwards, who had also lain down in the boat to avoid hitting his head against the rocks, which were at least two hundred feet above him, straightened up, revealing a face so pale and haggard that Bob was startled. But he was not so near dead as he seemed to be, as his actions proved.

The river, where it entered the valley, made a sudden turn to the right, and of course the current set into the bight of the bend, taking the boat with it, and carrying it within ten or fifteen feet of the shore, which was thickly lined with bushes.

George's first act was to catch up the painter and jump overboard with it; and,

although the current whirled him along as if he had been a feather, he succeeded in crossing it and reaching the slack waters near the bank.

The rest was comparatively easy. A turn of the painter around a convenient sapling held the boat until the current swung it into the eddy, and the instant it touched the shore Bob Howard sprang out.

He and George had just strength enough to make the painter fast to the sapling, and then they sank down side by side on the grass, and lay there panting and exhausted.

They were so dazed and bewildered by their escape from the grasp of the current, which they regarded as little short of miraculous, that they could not speak.

They did not move until they were brought to their feet by a low, rumbling noise, followed by an explosion so terrific that it would have drowned the discharge of a battery of the heaviest artillery.

"What in the name of wonder was that?" gasped Bob, who was so weak that he shook like a leaf.

George did not answer. He was looking over Bob's shoulder, with eyes that seemed ready to start from their sockets.

Bob faced about, and saw a sight that well nigh extinguished the little spark of vitality which the terrors of the canyon had left in him.

CHAPTER XXV.

SAM ASKS FOR HIS PAY.

"WE did our very best to save him, but he's gone, and my father is a millionaire."

This was the burden of Arthur Howard's thoughts, as he wandered restlessly about the grove, with his hands in his pockets, and his eyes fixed on the ground. The bank of the river was deserted by all save himself.

The herdsmen were gathered in little groups about the ranch, conversing in hushed tones, and now and then there was an ominous growl among them that boded no good to somebody, and threatening eyes and scowling faces were turned toward the window of the office.

The superintendent and Mr. Evans stood off by themselves, occasionally exchanging a word or two, but generally remaining silent

and thoughtful. Uncle Bob sat alone in the office, thinking sometimes of his lost nephew, but more frequently of the bright and dazzling future which had so suddenly and unexpectedly opened before him. Like Arthur, he was entirely unnoticed, the men about him having no sympathy for him. Their thoughts were with Bob and his companion.

"The old fellow seems to take it very much to heart," said Mr. Jacobs. "But it's my opinion it is all put on for the occasion."

"That seems to be the opinion of the herdsmen, too, if one may judge by their looks and actions," answered Mr. Evans. "If they had the least excuse for it, they would put the dogs on him and his son and drive them out of the valley."

"I know their temper better than you do, and I am not far from right when I say that they would serve them worse than that," said the superintendent. "If the men thought that Arthur and his father were in any way mixed up with this morning's work, a regiment of soldiers could not save them."

"I would give the world, if I owned it, to

know whether or not they suspect anything," thought Arthur, who now and then stopped behind a tree or a clump of bushes to take an anxious survey of the groups about the ranch. "Why don't they go off about their work, and let me go to my room? They needn't blame me for anything that happened, for I didn't suggest it, and I had no hand in carrying it out. Sam did it out of a desire to be revenged on Bob for telling Mr. Jacobs that he could not have employment on the ranch. But, great Scott! what a sight that was!" said Arthur, covering his eyes with his hands. "I don't think I shall ever forget it."

And he never did. The pale, despairing face which the helpless Bob had turned toward the shore, just before his boat took its final plunge, haunted him day and night as long as he lived.

Just then Arthur was startled by a rustling in the thicket close by his side (he was so timid now, that every little thing frightened him), and turned quickly, to find Sam at his side.

The latter was as serene and smiling as usual, and did not look at all like a man who had been guilty of a crime for which his life might at any time pay the forfeit.

Arthur was glad to see him on some accounts, and on others he wasn't. As he could not bear to be alone with his accusing conscience, he wanted somebody to talk to, but he would rather it had been somebody besides Sam.

It would have been a great relief to him if the herdsman had saddled his horse and left the valley, never to return; but something told him that Sam did not intend to do anything of the kind. He was more familiar in his manner than he was the day before, and not quite so civil.

"Well, what do you think of it?" said he, at the same time backing up against a tree, so that he could not be seen by the men about the ranch. "You've got your cousin's fortune, and I have had my revenge."

"I wish you hadn't done it," was all Arthur could say, in reply.

"That's a pretty way for you to talk, now,

when it is too late—isn't it?" said Sam, in disgust. "Yesterday, you were eager for it. I saw it very plainly, and that was the reason I proposed it."

"But I didn't suppose you would do it."

"That was because you didn't know me. I never fool about such things. You were in dead earnest, and I knew it, and acted accordingly."

"Do you suppose that the men suspect anything?"

"If they did, they would make short work of us," assured the herdsman with a grim smile. "We wouldn't be here to see another sunrise, I bet you."

Arthur winced at this, and he was greatly alarmed, too.

Sam's use of the personal pronoun seemed to indicate that he was not willing to shoulder all the responsibility himself. According to his way of thinking, Arthur was as deep in the mud as he was, and Sam did not mean to let him forget it, either.

"Everything is in our favor," continued the herdsman. "I have heard Bob's father

tell him more than once that he didn't look for anything but to see him lost in the canyon some day, and there are others who have heard him say the same thing. So, why should they suspect that we had anything to do with it?"

"I don't know, I am sure. I asked the question because the men up there,"—here Arthur nodded his head toward the ranch—"seem to be angry about something."

"Probably they are; for, as I told you yesterday, they don't like you or your father. They know that you will come into possession of this property now, and they don't want to have it so."

"I don't see how they are going to help it."

"I don't either; but they can make this a hot country for you, if they set about it. Now, then, to business! I have come for my pay."

"For your pay!" echoed Arthur.

"That's what I said. You don't suppose that I am going to put you into possession of a property worth millions of dollars, and take the risk of a lynching for nothing, do

you? What kind of a hair-pin do you think I am, anyway?"

Arthur was almost overwhelmed with amazement and terror. He had never dreamed of this.

"I don't owe you anything," he managed to say at last. "I told you that I would use my influence with my father to have you employed on the ranch; and so I will, just as soon as Mr. Evans goes away and I can find an opportunity to speak with him in private; but, beyond that, I can do nothing for you."

"It ain't enough, pilgrim!" replied Sam, in quiet, but decided tones. "Must have more."

"But I say I don't owe you anything."

"I reckon I could make you change your mind in just two minutes, if I should set about it," said Sam, looking at Arthur in a way that made him shiver all over.

"How much do you want?"

"Well, five thousand dollars will do to start on!"

"Five thousand dollars!" gasped Arthur,

who thought he would surely have fallen to the ground, if he had not placed his hand against the nearest tree to steady himself. "Why, I haven't got five thousand cents to my name."

"No, I suppose not," replied Sam, indifferently. "Clerks, who sport such dry goods as you had on your back when you first came here, don't generally have any loose change laying around. But your father's got it. He must have twenty or thirty thousand dollars in that safe of his."

"But he wouldn't give any of it to me," said Arthur, who was every moment growing more astonished and alarmed.

"Oh, I guess he would, if he knew all the circumstances," answered the herdsman, significantly.

"But I don't want him to know all the circumstances," protested Arthur, quickly. "And what excuse can I make to him for demanding so large a sum of money?"

"That is a matter in which I am not at all interested. I don't care how you get it, so long as you get it; and I fancy you will

make up your mind to do it after you've had time to think the matter over."

"No, I won't," said Arthur, his fears giving away to anger. "You had no right to ask it of me, and I shall make no effort to get it. I shouldn't succeed if I did. You proposed this thing yourself, and did the work alone and unaided, and I—"

"Well, why don't you go on?" inquired Sam, when the other paused and looked at him. "See here, my friend," he added, shaking his finger at Arthur, while his eyes flashed threateningly, "you have had your say, and now I am going to have mine. I want that money, and I am going to have it, too. You hear me? If you won't get it for me, I will go straight to your father, and tell him the whole story. I think he would rather give me the money than lose all Bob's millions—don't you?"

"Oh, don't do that!" implored Arthur, whose anger was all gone now. "I'll ask him for it the first chance I get."

"But if he wouldn't—if he doesn't fork out on demand, I will see that the boys get

wind of the whole affair, and what do you suppose would be the result? They are just in the right humor for business now, and if I should leave a little note where one of them could find it, you and your father would be—"

Here Sam stopped, and looked up at the branches over his head. It needed no words to explain what he meant.

"Don't! don't!" cried Arthur, who was trembling in every limb. "I will ask for the money before I go to sleep to-night—honor bright, I will."

"I knew you would change your mind after you had thought the matter over," said Sam, with a meaning smile. "Now, how soon may I expect to get the five thousand?"

"Just as soon as I can induce my father to give it to me," promised Arthur.

"Well, say to-morrow, then. I will meet you here in the grove right away after breakfast. I don't want a job at herding sheep, now, and I don't want to hang around any longer than I can help; so don't waste any time."

"Are you going away?" asked Arthur, eagerly.

"You bet! I don't think my constitution can stand this climate."

"And will you promise that you'll never come back and make any more demands upon me?"

"Not much! I've struck a bonanza, and I'm going to work it as long as the lead holds out. I know what you are thinking of, young man; but you'll find that I'm nobody's fool. Now, remember, I shall be on hand to-morrow morning, and I want to find you here with that money."

Sam disappeared, and Arthur resumed his wanderings about the grove. He was frightened almost out of his senses, and wished from the bottom of his heart that he had never seen or heard of his companion in guilt. He even went further than that, and wished that his uncle had given his property into the keeping of somebody else, and that he and his father were back in Bolton, where they came from. What in the world could he say that would induce his cousin's guar-

dian to give him the five thousand dollars that Sam demanded as hush-money? He knew very well that he couldn't get it; and even if he did, what good would it do him?

There was evil coming upon him; he was sure of it. And this money would only postpone it for a little while. It would not avert it, for Sam had said very plainly that he was not going to be satisfied with the amount he had named—that he intended to make demands as often as he felt like it.

Arthur grew almost wild when he recalled the man's words. He wrung his hands, and even quickened his steps to a run, as if he hoped to leave his haunting fears behind him.

"There is only one thing I can do," said he to himself, after he had bestowed as much thought upon the situation as the perturbed state of his mind would permit. "I must get away from here. Father must give me money enough to take me back to Bolton. I say *must* do it, or I shall help myself to what I need. There goes Mr. Evans, and father is probably alone in the office. If he is, I

will settle this matter with him before I am an hour older."

So saying, Arthur wiped the big drops of perspiration from his face, put on as bold a front as he could, and started toward the ranch. A few of the herdsmen had dispersed to their work, but those who remained scowled at him so savagely as he passed that Arthur made all haste to get into the hall out of their sight.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ARTHUR TRIES TO HELP HIMSELF.

ARTHUR found his father alone in the office, pacing the floor, with his hands in his pockets, and a look of triumph and exultation on his face; but, when his son entered, he sank into the nearest chair, and tried to appear very sorrowful, indeed.

"That was a sad event, Arthur," said he, with a long-drawn sigh—"a very sad event. I don't wonder that you look frightened. I was frightened myself, and so was everybody else; but we have the satisfaction of knowing that we used our utmost endeavors to save him."

We have already told how hard Uncle Bob and Arthur worked to keep the boat from going into the canyon. The former did nothing but shout out orders, to which no-

body paid the least attention, while Arthur stood by and looked on, without uttering a word.

"Yes, I know we did all we could," replied Arthur, faintly; "but we couldn't help him. Bob knew as well as we did that he was doomed. He told me yesterday, while we were down the river looking at the canyon, that if I went out in a boat, I must be careful not to let that current get hold of me. If I did, I might as well be in the rapids above Niagara Falls, for nothing could save me. Now, father, I can't stay here any longer, and I want you to give me money enough to take me back to Bolton."

"I should like to go there myself, or somewhere else, and stay until time has somewhat effaced the memory of this terrible occurrence; but, under the circumstances, I don't think it best for either one of us to leave," answered Uncle Bob.

"Why not?" asked Arthur. "Why can't we both go?"

"Because our absence might give people occasion to say hard things about us."

"I don't see why it should. We had nothing whatever to do with it."

"Certainly not. But that wouldn't make any difference to these herdsmen, who are as unreasonable as so many pigs. I can see very plainly that they don't like us, and don't want us here; but, to tell you the plain truth, Arthur, I should be afraid to go away after what has happened."

"Why would you?"

"Because these ignorant men would take it as a confession of guilt on my part."

All unaccustomed as Arthur was to reasoning *a posteriori*—that is, from the effect to the cause—he told himself that his father never could have reached this conclusion if he had not felt guilty.

Although Uncle Bob tried to believe that he was sorry his nephew was gone, he did not succeed in deceiving either himself or those about him; and it was not at all improbable that an attempt at flight on his part would have resulted in something serious.

Whenever Uncle Bob allowed his mind to dwell upon this matter, he became as badly

frightened as Arthur was. Dearly as he loved money, he loved life better, and he would willingly have surrendered his nephew's millions if, by so doing he could have transported himself and Arthur back to Bolton, where he knew they would be safe.

"And must we stay here in the midst of these lawless men, who may at any moment take a notion to hang us?" exclaimed Arthur in great alarm.

"It seems to be our only chance," confessed Uncle Bob, in agitated tones. "I have thought the matter all over, and I don't see that we can do anything else. If we could only make these men believe that we take the matter as much to heart as they do, they wouldn't think so hard of us; but they are very obstinate and set in their ways, and it will take time to accomplish that."

"But, father, I *can't* stay here," insisted Arthur, jumping to his feet, and walking nervously up and down the floor. "I shall go crazy if I do—I know I shall. If you won't go with me, give me money and let me go alone. You've got plenty of it. I heard one

of the men say that there were twenty or thirty thousand dollars in that safe."

"There's more than that in there," said Uncle Bob. "But it isn't the money I care for. I was thinking of you. It would not be best for you to leave now."

"I will take all the risk," pleaded Arthur. "Don't refuse, for if you do, there is no telling what may happen."

"Don't get excited over it," advised Uncle Bob, who was anything but calm himself. "Be governed by me, and hope for the best."

Arthur who became almost frantic whenever he thought of Sam, and the interview he had appointed for the morrow, "right away after breakfast," said everything he could think of to induce his father to grant his request, but he urged and begged in vain.

When Uncle Bob once made up his mind to a thing, he was fully as obstinate and unreasonable as the herdsmen to whom he had referred in tones so contemptuous, and Arthur might as well have argued with the stone walls of the ranch.

Finding that he could make no impression

upon his father, the boy grew angry, and was more than once on the point of declaring that Sam had made a demand upon him for five thousand dollars, threatening, in case of refusal, to publish a story of his own getting up, that would induce the herdsmen to make short work of both of them.

But his guilty fears would not allow him to do it, and, besides, he had some other plans in his head that he wanted to try first, so he bolted out of the office, banging the door behind him.

"He's the meanest old hulks of a father that any fellow ever had," thought Arthur, stopping in the hall long enough to shake his fist at the door, "and I don't care what happens to him. As he is too pig-headed to do as I want him to do, I'll help myself to every cent there is in that safe this very night if I can get in. If I succeed, I will give Sam his hush-money to-morrow morning, and hire him to show me the way to the railroad station. I have seen quite enough of Arizona, and if I can only get aboard a train of cars that is headed for the East, the prospect of

owning four times four million dollars won't bring me back here."

While Arthur was talking to himself in this way, he looked cautiously out of the door, and, having satisfied himself, by a few minutes' reconnoisance, that the herdsmen had all dispersed, he walked across the porch, and bent his steps toward the grove.

He wanted to be alone, and this was the most retired spot he could find. It was utterly impossible for him to keep still, and here he could walk about among the trees without being seen by anybody.

Arthur had been in the grove, perhaps half an hour, keeping his thoughts busy with the plans he intended to put into operation in case his attempt to steal the money in the safe did not prove successful, when he saw the superintendent stop in front of the porch with a couple of horses that were saddled and bridled.

After he had stood there for a minute or two, Uncle Bob came out of the ranch, with his hat on his head and a riding-whip in his hand. He mounted one of the horses, Mr.

Jacobs sprang upon the other, and together they rode away.

"They are going off somewhere on business," soliloquized Arthur, "and this is as good an opportunity as I shall have to take a look at that safe. I wish the money in it belonged to me, and that the old man wanted some of it. He shouldn't have a cent if he was starving."

Arthur gave the horsemen time to get out of sight, and then he left the grove and walked toward the ranch.

He went into the office, and having locked the door to prevent interruption, he began an examination of the safe, which was set into the wall so that nothing but the face of it could be seen.

If it had been provided with a combination lock, Arthur would have set to work upon it at once; but as it was an old-fashioned article, requiring a key to open it, he could do nothing.

Thinking it possible that his father might have left the key in the room, he began looking for it in the bookcases, under the

lounge, along the edge of the carpet—in every place, in fact, that seemed to offer the least chance for concealment, but his search was in vain.

"It is in his pocket, most likely," said Arthur, as he unlocked the door, sat down in one of the easy chairs, and opened a book, which he had taken at random down from one of the shelves. "I'll just hang around the rest of the day, and satisfy myself on that point. That key is the only thing that stands in my way. If I can get my hands on that, the rest will be easy enough, for I know how to open the safe."

Arthur turned his chair about so that he could not see the river when he happened to glance out of the window—somehow, he could not bear the sight of it now—and tried to amuse himself by looking at the engravings in the book he held in his hand; but the excitement and suspense which had taken the place of his fears were too much for him, and sometimes he would spring to his feet and rush about the room like some caged wild animal.

But he was quiet enough when his father returned about dinner-time, and came into the office, accompanied by the superintendent.

Some argument had arisen between them regarding the business of the ranch, and, in order to settle it, they had to refer to the books that were in the safe.

Arthur saw his father take the key from his pocket and insert it in the lock, and took particular notice to the way he twirled the knob.

When the door swung open and the interior of the safe was disclosed to his view, Arthur was not a little astonished.

One of the shelves was piled full of greenbacks, and on the shelf under it were four large tin boxes, which were filled to the brim with bright, shining gold pieces.

As he did not care to stay there and listen to a discussion about matters of which he knew nothing and cared less, Arthur put away his book and went out into the hall.

He walked about for a few minutes, with his eyes fastened thoughtfully on the floor, and then hurried to his room and began to

unpack his valise. He had not thought of it before.

"There's a lot of money in that safe," said he to himself, "and I must have something to carry it in, for I couldn't get the tenth part of it into my pockets. I don't know what the old man will say when he finds that his safe has been emptied; and, in order to keep it from his knowledge as long as I can, I will take the key with me when I go. I wish now that I had told Sam to meet me about midnight. If he comes to the grove this afternoon, I will make new arrangements with him."

Arthur spent the entire afternoon in the grove, with his thoughts for company; but Sam did not put in an appearance. He knew better.

He had made some threats against Bob in the presence of some of the herdsmen, and the valley was not a safe place for him. He was idling away the time in the seclusion of a deep ravine a short distance away, waiting impatiently for the morrow.

Arthur went to bed as soon as he had

eaten his supper, and when his father came into the room, about eleven o'clock, he lay with his face to the wall, apparently fast asleep. The two had but little to say to each other since the interview in the morning.

Uncle Bob tried to be sociable while they were at the table, but Arthur would scarcely listen to him.

"I was the only friend he had on the ranch," the youth kept saying to himself, "and I want him to see that he has made an enemy of me. If he doesn't know it now he will find it out very shortly."

It was long after midnight before Arthur made any move to show that he was awake. Then he turned over very cautiously, and, after listening intently for a few minutes, he made up his mind that the time for action had arrived.

Noiselessly he arose from the bed and moved towards the chair upon which his father had deposited his clothing.

After a little fumbling in the dark, he found the pocket of which he was in search, and his fingers closed tightly on the coveted key.

Hardly able to repress an exclamation of triumph, Arthur picked up his valise, which he had placed at the foot of his bed, unlocked the door and passed through the hall into the office.

Feeling his way to the safe, he put the key into the lock, turned the knob, and the door opened for him.

"It's all mine," thought he, as he opened his valise and proceeded to stow the greenbacks away in it. "If father wants to stay here, and run the risk of being hanged, he can do it and welcome; but I'm off for Bolton, this very—"

All on a sudden, the door of the office creaked on its hinges, and the room was brilliantly illuminated. With a piercing cry of terror, Arthur looked over his shoulder and saw his father standing behind him, holding a lamp in one hand and a big revolver in the other.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LISTENER IN THE GROVE.

IT is hard to tell which was the more astonished by this unexpected encounter—the father, who having been aroused from uneasy slumber by the stealthy closing of his bedroom door, and growing alarmed for the safety of the large amount of money in his possession, had aroused himself and come into the office to make sure that everything was right there, or the son, who had so suddenly been interrupted in the very act of robbing the safe.

The two looked at each other for a moment in silence, and then Arthur put back the package of greenbacks he had been on the point of stowing away in his valise, while Uncle Bob placed the lamp on the table and sat down.

"Arthur, what in the world does this mean?" said he, sternly.

"It means that if you hadn't come in here just as you did, I should have been miles on my way toward Dixon Springs by this time to-morrow," replied the son, rising to his feet and boldly confronting his father.

"And did you intend to rob me?"

"I certainly intended to take some of this money to help me along," answered Arthur, without the least tremor in his tones. "I asked you for it this morning, openly and above board, and you wouldn't let me have it, saying, as an excuse for your refusal, that you were 'afraid that the herdsmen would do something to me if I attempted to leave the valley so soon after Bob's disappearance.'"

"And I tell you so now," said his father.

"Didn't I assure you that I was willing to take all the risk?" demanded Arthur.

"And didn't I tell you, in effect, that if you would only be governed by me and consent to stay here until this thing had time to blow over, it would then be perfectly safe for both of us to go East?" asked his father,

in reply. "I am as anxious to see the last of Arizona as you are. I had a long talk with Mr. Jacobs about it yesterday, and decided to employ him to manage the ranch for me, while you and I would go back to Bolton to live. I should have told you about it as soon as I came home, if you had shown any disposition to talk to me."

"Why don't you go at once?" growled Arthur.

"I have already given you my reason. I think I ought to stay here for a few months, at least; and Mr. Jacobs thinks so, too."

"Well, then, won't you give me some money and let me go?"

"I answered that question yesterday," said Uncle Bob, in very decided tones. "Have you got any money in that valise? Then put it back where it belongs, and we will go back to bed."

Knowing that his hopeful son could not be trusted, Uncle Bob took the precaution to see that these instructions were obeyed to the very letter.

He took his stand beside the open valise,

and closely watched Arthur, as he took the packages out of it and piled them on the shelf. Then he closed and locked the safe and took possession of the key, telling himself the while that Arthur would never be able to get his hands upon it again.

The two did not speak as Uncle Bob took up the lamp and revolver and led the way to their room.

He did not appear to be angry, either; but Arthur was almost beside himself with fury. He was more—he was desperate. There was still one plan to be tried, and, if that failed, it was all over with him and Uncle Bob.

"Perhaps, when it is too late, he will wish he had let me have that money," thought Arthur, as he tumbled into bed and turned his face to the wall. "His excuse for refusing me is a very flimsy one. He's got Bob's money, and I believe he would rather risk his life than lose his grip on a single dollar of it."

Arthur slept in spite of the exciting scene through which he had passed, but his slumber was disturbed with frightful dreams, in

which the angry herdsmen and Bob Howard's broken oar, which, in some mysterious way, was brought forward as evidence against him, bore prominent parts.

His father greeted him in the morning as cordially as he always did, but Arthur was too angry and sulky to be civil. He ate but little breakfast, and as soon as he arose from the table he went to the grove to keep his appointment with Sam.

He would have been glad to postpone the interview indefinitely, but he was afraid to do it. He believed that Sam would have something to say to his father, now, and, before he did that, Arthur wanted to make a few suggestions.

He found the herdsman in the grove, waiting for him. It is probable that he fully expected to receive the money he had demanded for holding his tongue; for, when he saw Arthur approaching, he advanced to meet him, at the same time extending his hand, as if he thought the latter was going to put something into it.

"I haven't got it," said Arthur, shortly.

Sam scowled fiercely, and looked mad enough to do almost anything.

"I can't help it," continued Arthur, "I did the best I could for you. I asked my father for it yesterday, as I told you I would, but he wouldn't give it to me; and last night I tried to take it out of the safe, but he caught me at it."

"Whew!" whistled Sam.

"It's a fact," said Arthur earnestly. "I've tried every plan I can think of, and can do nothing more."

"What did you say you wanted to do with the money?"

"I told him that I wanted to go back East, but father said he was afraid that if I attempted to leave the ranch now, I would get myself into trouble with the herdsmen."

"Very likely you would," replied Sam, indifferently. "I talked with some of them yesterday, and, although they don't know that you had any hand in sawing the oars—"

"And I didn't, either," interrupted Arthur. "You sawed them yourself, and I never knew a thing about it."

"Look here, young man," exclaimed Sam, in a tone of voice that frightened Arthur, "you needn't try to throw all the responsibility upon my shoulders, for I won't stand it! You are just as much to blame for what happened to Bob Howard and his partner as I am!"

"Didn't you propose it?" faltered Arthur.

"Didn't you consent to it?" retorted Sam, looking at Arthur so savagely that the latter dared not deny the accusation. "You did! and if the boys ever find it out, they will make things hot for you, I tell you."

"But of course you will not tell them," implored Arthur.

"If I can get my five thousand dollars, no. If I can't, yes. I suppose I shall have to talk to the old man now."

"I don't see what else you can do," assented Arthur. "But I say, Sam, don't mention my name to him, will you? Just tell him that the boys suspect that *he* knows how Bob's oar was broken, and that will frighten him so that he will hand the money over to you without saying a word."

"That's worth thinking of," admitted Sam.

"If you want money to keep still about this thing, that is the only way to get it," declared Arthur. "I can't raise it for you, and that's all there is about it. I have tried and failed."

"Well, I shan't fail," said Sam, emphatically. "If I do, the old man may make up his mind that something disagreeable is going to happen. I'll sleep on what you have told me, and perhaps I shall be down again tomorrow morning. Good-by!"

"But, Sam, promise that you will not even hint that I know how Bob's oar was broken," begged Arthur.

"All right!" answered the herdsman.

But he did not give the promise. The time might come, he told himself, when the youth would be of use to him, and he thought it best to retain a hold upon him.

"I've done it," soliloquized Arthur, as he once more began his aimless wanderings about the grove, "and now we shall see what will come of it. It was the only course that was left open to me, for I could see very plainly that Sam is fully determined to make

trouble, unless his demands are complied with. I hope he will frighten father so badly that he will pack up and leave for Bolton at once."

Arthur was so deeply engrossed with his meditations that he did not hear the slight rustling in the thicket behind him, which was made by a man—an unintentional listener to the conversation that had taken place between himself and Sam—as he arose from a log on which he had been sitting, and shook both his fists in the air. It was old Ike, the cook.

He was the first man who had found employment on the ranch, and, like the rest of the hired help, he thought everything of Bob, and looked with distrust upon those who had come there to take his dead father's place.

Leaving an assistant to attend to his duties in the kitchen, Ike retreated to the grove shortly after the boat went into the canyon, and he had been there ever since. He liked to be there. It had been the lost boy's favorite resort, and, while he was hidden among the trees, he could give full vent to his sorrow, for there was no one looking on to accuse him of a lack of manhood.

Ike peeped cautiously through the bushes to see where Arthur was, and then he shook his fists at him, and moved away from his place of concealment with long, noiseless strides.

He walked with that firm, determined step that men sometimes adopt when they have made up their minds to do something; but, when he reached the porch, he came to a sudden stop, pulled off his hat, and scratched his head vigorously.

The operation must have put new ideas into his mind, for he went on around the house, and made his way to the corral in which the riding-horses were kept.

Putting a saddle and bridle on the first horse he caught, he forded the river at the place where the lake emptied into it, and as soon as he reached the opposite bank, he started on a gallop for Mr. Evans' ranch.

"So *that's* the way my poor Bob come to go into that awful hole, is it?" said Ike, speaking in a loud voice, as if he were addressing some one at a distance. "Sam sawed the oars so that they would break when the

boys laid out their strength on them—he did it because he knew that Bob didn't want him on the ranch, most likely—and that scoundrel, Arthur, knew all about it, and never said a word. Of course, he didn't, for he wanted his cousin's money. I knew them two would make trouble sooner or later, but I didn't think they would be at it for a while yet."

It was a strange and startling story that Ike had to tell when he reached Mr. Evans' ranch.

That gentleman listened calmly, and the narrator noticed that he did not seem to be at all surprised at what he heard. He, too, had been expecting trouble, but he had not looked for it so soon.

"When I saw that Bob's oar was broken, I told Jacobs that I would give anything for a chance to examine it," said Mr. Evans, when Ike finished his story. "It was made on purpose to stand that current, and I knew the boy could not have broken it unless it had been tampered with."

"Well, them are the facts of the case, Mr.

Evans, just as I have been telling 'em to you," said Ike. "Will you come down and boss the hanging?"

"I will come down immediately; but there will be no hanging—no violence whatever. Do you understand me?" replied Mr. Evans, quietly, but firmly.

Old Ike was profoundly astonished.

"Do you mean to say that we honest men have got to live in the same valley with them rascals?" he demanded, fiercely. "I won't do it, and that's flat!"

"I don't mean to say anything of the kind. Their presence will not trouble you after to-day. Leave everything to me, and don't lisp one word to any of the boys about what you heard in the grove. You will only make trouble if you do."

Ike was too angry to reply. He wheeled his horse and rode rapidly away, while Mr. Evans stood gazing after him with a face that was full of apprehension.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A HURRIED FLIGHT.

UNCLE BOB sat alone in his office, thinking over the events of the preceding night, when, all of a sudden, he was aroused from his reverie by the sound of a horse's hoofs, and looked out at the window to see Mr. Evans coming toward the ranch at a furious gallop.

He rode up to the porch, turned his horse over to Ike, who was there to receive him, and, after saying a few earnest words to the man, and shaking his finger at him warningly, he came into the hall, and entered the office without ceremony.

Uncle Bob was astonished, and not a little alarmed as well. There was an expression on his visitor's face that he did not like to see there.

"Mr. Howard," said the newcomer, de-

positing his hat on the table, and helping himself to a chair, "the whole thing is out on you, and you want to make your stay in this country as short as you possibly can."

"Bless my soul!" cried Uncle Bob. "What do you mean?"

Mr. Evans looked sharply into the man's face before he made any reply. He must have been satisfied with what he saw there, for he said to himself:

"This man is in no way mixed up in this dreadful affair. Arthur and Sam are at the bottom of it, but he will have to go, all the same, for the boys never can be made to believe that he is innocent." Then, aloud, he continued, "It is my unpleasant duty to inform you that Arthur has got himself into serious trouble, and that he is as good as lynched already."

Uncle Bob's face grew as pale as death. He sank helplessly back in his chair, and his hands fell by his side.

"Not—not *my* Arthur?" he gasped.

"Yes, your son Arthur, the very boy who tried to rob that safe last night."

"It's false!" cried Uncle Bob, with a desperate but unsuccessful attempt to look indignant. "My son never tried to rob my safe."

Mr. Evans smiled incredulously.

He had had his doubts on that point, but he had none now. Uncle Bob's face told him that Ike's story was all true.

"He has confessed in the hearing of one of your men that he tried to steal five thousand dollars to shut up Sam's mouth," said the visitor.

"Who is Sam?" Uncle Bob managed to ask. "Now, Mr. Evans, I don't understand you at all, and I wish you would be more explicit. You surely do not mean to hint that Arthur had anything to do with the accident that befell his cousin?"

"It was no accident, Mr. Howard," said the visitor, bluntly. "It was a put-up job, and I mean to say, in just so many words, that Arthur knew it was going to happen before it *did* happen. Sam—I don't think there is any one on the ranch who knows what his other name is—used to be one of your brother's herdsmen. He was discharged

for cause, and ordered never to show himself in the valley again; but on the day you arrived, he came back, and sought employment. Managing in some way to scrape an acquaintance with Arthur, he proposed a plan to get rid of Bob, and your son consented to it. Sam carried out that plan by sawing the oars that belonged to the skiff, so that they would break when the boys tried to pull up out of the current."

"I don't believe a word of it," declared Uncle Bob, who, during this long explanation, had managed to collect a few of his scattered wits. Then, seeing that his visitor's eye began to sparkle threateningly, he hastened to add, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Evans, but somebody has been imposing upon you with a story that cannot have the least foundation in fact. According to your own statement, Arthur took no active part in this thing, and neither did he have any hand in sawing the oars—if, indeed, they were sawed at all."

"But he was an accessory," said Mr. Evans, earnestly, "and he is a doomed boy, unless

you take immediate steps to protect him. My advice to you would be to see him without the loss of a moment. You will probably find him in the grove—at any rate, that was the place where he held his interview with Sam this morning."

Uncle Bob thought this a suggestion that was worth acting upon. He put on his hat and left the office, while Mr. Evans seated himself in front of the window and watched him as he hurried toward the grove.

Just then the door opened, and old Ike thrust his head into the room.

"Mr. Evans," said he, in a cautious whisper, "I can't keep this secret in much longer. It's growing bigger every minute, and I shall have to tell it pretty soon, or bust!"

"You hold your tongue—that's all you have to do," said Mr. Evans, sternly.

"But what will the boys do to me, when they find it out?" asked Ike, anxiously.

"The boys needn't know anything about it until the law gets ready to take hold of Sam and Arthur. Mr. Howard is entirely innocent."

Ike was both astonished and disgusted—

astonished to learn that the new master of the ranch was in no way responsible for the occurrences of the preceding day, and disgusted to hear that the guilty ones were to be punished by process of law.

The United States marshal, who would probably take the matter in hand, was much too slow and deliberate in his movements to suit Ike, and, besides, the punishment he would inflict upon the culprits would not be commensurate with their offence.

Ike lingered a moment, as if he wanted to say something more, and then disappeared, closing the door softly behind him.

Uncle Bob was gone a long time—so long, in fact, that Mr. Evans began to grow anxious, and even alarmed. He did not at all like the look he saw in Ike's eye, and he knew that every moment was of the utmost value to Arthur and his father.

To his great relief, Uncle Bob appeared at last, and Mr. Evans noticed that when he emerged from the grove he was mopping his face with his handkerchief, and that he moved with very unsteady steps.

He staggered into the office and threw himself into his chair without speaking. There was no need that the visitor should make any inquiries, for his appearance and actions told in plain language that he had passed through a trying ordeal in the grove, and that, during his long interview with Arthur, he had learned some startling things.

"I have not another word to say," he managed to gasp, at length. "What do you advise me to do?"

"To leave the valley at once—this very hour, and put yourself and Arthur under the protection of the troops at Camp Clark."

"Do you think the danger as great as that?" asked Uncle Bob, who, frightened as he was, spoke calmly.

"I know it," said Mr. Evans, with emphasis.

"Do you think the herdsmen will allow us to leave the ranch?"

"We must take our chances on that; and it is now or never. They are scattered all over the valley; but a great many of them will be in at dark, and I will not attempt to

say what the consequences will be if they find you here. I will act as your guide, and no doubt get myself into trouble by doing it. If you are going to take my advice, be quick about it. If you are not, I will go home."

These words aroused Uncle Bob, who jumped up and put his hand into his pocket, at the same time turning toward the safe.

"I will order two horses saddled at once," said he.

"Give no orders whatever," replied Mr. Evans, quickly, "unless yon want to arouse Ike's suspicions. Go to the corral and get your own horses, and act as if you were going to ride about the ranch."

"Well, we shall need some money to help us along," said Uncle Bob, picking up a pair of saddle-bags that lay on the table. "I suppose I have a right to take what is in the safe? It's mine, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," replied Mr. Evans.

And, although Uncle Bob would not have confessed the fact, even to himself, the tone in which the words were spoken removed a heavy burden of anxiety from his mind.

Although no attempt had been made to assist Bob and his friend after their boat went into the canyon, simply because everybody knew it would be useless, Uncle Bob had been constantly haunted by the fear that the boy might escape death in some miraculous way, and come back to rob him of the millions of which he believed himself to be the owner.

But Mr. Evans did not seem to think that such a thing could possibly happen, and so Uncle Bob breathed easier.

"But you mustn't take those things with you," added the visitor, as Uncle Bob walked toward the safe with the saddle-bags in his hand. "You will never get out of the valley if you do. Be content with what you can carry in your pockets, and leave the rest here until you can communicate with Mr. Jacobs."

Uncle Bob thought it best to act upon this suggestion; but, after he had stuffed his pockets as full of greenbacks as they could hold, he did not seem to have made any impression upon the contents of the safe. It looked as full as ever; and the greedy old

man could not bear the thought of leaving any of his ill-gotten wealth behind.

"These packages are so large that I cannot take many of them with me," said he, with a deep sigh of regret. "Will you carry some of them?"

"I wouldn't touch a dollar of that money," answered Mr. Evans, adding, mentally, "I don't see how you can do it, either."

"By-the-way," said Uncle Bob, as he locked the safe and put the key in one of the bookcases, so that Mr. Jacobs could find it when he wrote to him for the rest of the money, "you spoke about acting as our guide as far as Camp Clark. Why don't you show us the way to Dixon Springs while you are about it? I want to go back to the States as soon as I can."

"Camp Clark is about eighty miles nearer, and I want to see you surrounded by the boys in blue before I leave you," replied Mr. Evans. "They are the only ones who can save you. Now, if you are ready, come on and act— I meant to have told you yesterday that we never think of shearing our

sheep on our ranches. It is much easier and cheaper to drive them to the nearest station and shear them there, than it would be to buy or hire wagons enough to haul the wool over these mountains."

These last words were spoken in a loud tone of voice, and were intended for Ike's especial benefit.

As Mr. Evans opened the door rather suddenly, he saw that worthy but suspicious individual beat a hasty retreat along the porch and dive into the kichen. He banged the kettles and pans about for a moment or two, and then he stopped and looked out at the door.

Mr. Evans and Uncle Bob were walking slowly toward the corral, stopping now and then to look about them. They did not act as if they were in a hurry, but Ike was not deceived.

"Mebbe that plan will work, and then again mebbe it won't," said the latter, shaking his head knowingly. "Mr. Evans is pretty smart, but there is them in the world that are just as smart as he is."

Having put saddles and bridles on three of the best horses they could find in the corral, Mr. Evans and his companion mounted and rode toward the grove, Uncle Bob leading the animal that was intended for Arthur's use.

The latter was on the lookout for them, for his father had told him that Mr. Evans advised immediate flight. He was trembling all over, and his terror made him so weak that he could hardly mount his horse; but, with his father's assistance, he managed to get into the saddle at last, and then Mr. Evans led the way across the valley toward the road that ran to the top of the cliffs.

"Mebbe that plan will work, and mebbe it won't. The fellows who sent poor Bob down to the inside of the earth ain't going to get off as easy as they think they are. Mr. Evans is gone now, and I'll tell my story to Mr. Jacobs the very first thing I do."

The speaker was old Ike, the cook, who, from his place of concealment behind one of the outbuildings, saw all that went on in the grove. He knew that Mr. Evans intended to lead Arthur and his father to a place of

safety, and he was determined to prevent it if he could.

With this object in view, he turned about and ran toward the corral at the top of his speed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

"WHAT is it George?" asked Bob Howard, turning his eyes in every direction except the right one. "I don't see anything strange."

Still George made no reply. He simply raised his hand and pointed with his finger toward the middle of the valley. Bob looked, and then his own eyes began to open, and his pale face grew still paler.

It did not seem to him that his nerves could possibly stand another test just then, all unstrung as they were by the terrors of that long voyage in the dark; but now he was about to witness an exhibition of the wonderful powers of nature that would have made the heart of the bravest and strongest man beat rapidly with excitement and apprehension.

About three hundred yards from the spot on which he and his frightened companion stood, was something that looked like a long, natural ridge. It arose to the height of thirty feet or more, and was bare of vegetation. Beyond this ridge, extending the whole length of it, and gradually rising into view above the top of it, was an immense body of water, which was broken into innumerable cone-shaped billows, with broad, flat bases, and smooth, round tops.

These billows, which were of enormous size, were violently agitated, and, although they were tossed about in every direction, they did not change their positions, lose their shape, nor run together, each one, apparently, being independent of its neighbor, and owing its existence to a different power.

Slowly and majestically the billows grew in size and height, and still the boys gazed as if they were fascinated. Suddenly, there was another deafening report, which made the ground tremble beneath them, and up from the midst of the troubled mass arose a single column of water about as large around

as a hogshead, smooth as glass, and as clear as crystal, and shot toward the clouds.

It went up to an almost incredible height, and stood as motionless as if it were carved out of stone. Then, the power which created and sustained it ceasing to act, it crumbled to pieces, like a column of sand, and fell back among the billows, which, broken by its weight, rolled from one end of the ridge to the other, dashing the spray high in the air.

This continued for two or three minutes, after which the water subsided as suddenly as it had arisen, its disappearance being accompanied by a low, rumbling noise, which sounded like the muttering of distant thunder, and when that died away all was still.

The two boys drew a long breath, looked at each other in silence, and then they seated themselves on the ground again.

"Old fellow," said Bob, who was the first to recover his power of speech, "we have solved the mystery of Lost River Canyon. That's a geyser, and its the grandest sight I ever saw. I have been through the Yellowstone Park with my father—you can count

geysers up there by hundreds, you know—but that famed place can't show anything to compare with this. It was my good fortune to see all the big ones in operation, but none of them equalled this in grandeur, although the 'Giant' beat it in duration. I saw it play for three hours, and throw a column of water to the height of two hundred feet."

"Did they all make such a terrific noise as this one does?" inquired George.

"Some of them did, and some didn't. The 'Castle,' which not unfrequently plays for an hour at a time, and sends up a jet of water two hundred and fifty feet high, shakes the ground like an earthquake, and makes a noise louder than this one. When it gets ready to go to work, it begins to pulsate and throb at the rate of seventy beats a minute, which grow stronger and stronger all the while, and finally culminate in a blast that is almost deafening."

"Do you suppose that the explosions made by this geyser during its eruptions were the sounds we used to hear so regularly while we were at the ranch?"

"I am sure of it, and, in order to test the matter—Why, George, it is twelve o'clock!" exclaimed Bob, as he drew his watch from his pocket. "What time was it when we started for the lake? It couldn't have been much later than five o'clock—could it? Then, we must have been in that dreadful canyon almost seven hours. It didn't seem so long to me."

"Well, it did to me!" answered George, with a shudder. "I thought we were never going to see daylight again."

"So did I," answered Bob, who was fast recovering his usual spirits. "But here we are safe and sound, and none the worse for our terrible fright. More than that, we have solved the mystery which, like the source of the Nile, was 'so long a hidden thing to earth.'"

"And our discovery will die with us," said George, looking up at the tall cliffs which surrounded the valley on all sides. "We shall be prisoners here as long as we live."

"Not by a great sight," replied Bob, cheerfully. "We may not get out this week, or

this month, but we shall get out—you may depend upon that. Now, then, let's unload the boat, pitch the tent, and get some dinner."

"I don't want anything to eat," said George.

"Neither do I; but I thought that perhaps a cup of coffee and a sandwich would put a little life and strength into us. Besides, if we keep busy at something we shall have no time to think, you know."

George was fully sensible of that fact, and so, when he saw Bob jump to his feet and start toward the boat, he got up and went with him, although it required the exercise of all the will-power he possessed to enable him to do it.

His courage and fortitude had never before been so severely tested, and if he had been alone he would probably have thrown himself down upon the ground and abandoned himself to despair. But he could not do that while his companion was so sanguine and full of hope.

He lent his aid in pitching the tent on a

little natural lawn, a short distance from the river, and it was not long before he became so interested in his work, and in listening to Bob, who kept up an almost incessant talking, that he forgot all about his wild ride through the canyon, and his narrow escape from death.

When the tent had been put up, George lingered to tighten the guys, while Bob went back to the boat again. Presently, he called to his companion, and threw something out on the bank.

"Didn't I tell you that we were the victims of treachery?" said he. "Just take a glance at the stump of that oar and tell me what you think about it?"

"Who did it?" said George, when he had examined what was left of the oar, and found the marks of a saw upon it.

"You tell," replied Bob. "I didn't suppose I had an enemy on the ranch; but that proves that there is somebody there who wanted me to go into that canyon, believing that if I did, I would never get out alive. He will find that he reckoned without his

host, will he not? Put it away in some safe place, George. We must take it home with us, even if we have to leave everything else behind us in order to carry it there. Now perhaps we had better load our guns, for we don't know who or what are neighbors are."

"What do you mean by that?

"I mean that there must be wild animals of some sort in the valley," replied Bob. "If they know how to get in, of course they know how to get out again, and all we've go to do is to find a trail, put the dogs on it, and let them follow it up. It will be sure to lead to some gulch or canyon that we can't see from here, and, by using that as a highway, we shall be able to get out."

"That's the very idea," said George, stooping down to caress the setters, which had taken possession of the blanket their thoughtful master had spread upon the ground for their accommodation. "Do you know I had wholly forgotten that we had brought any dogs with us?"

"So had I. I was so taken up with other matters that I didn't even see them get out

of the boat, nor did I notice how they behaved during that eruption. We must take the best of care of them, for they are our sole dependence now. You thought we couldn't find use for all this grub, didn't you?" added Bob, surveying the long row of well-filled baskets he had placed upon the bank. "We may go hungry yet before we see home again."

"How far off do you suppose it is?"

"I will answer that question, if you will tell me how fast our boat traveled when she was shooting through the canyon."

"She went like a flash of light," replied George.

"Well, then, seeing that light travels from the sun to the earth—a distance of ninety-one millions of miles—in eight minutes, we must have passed around our little planet a good many times during our seven hours' ride. But, for all that, I don't think we are more than sixty or seventy miles from home."

"That's far enough," said George. "We shall be weary and footsore before we get there, I tell you."

Having loaded their guns and laid them where they could be readily seized in case of emergency, George busied himself in gathering a supply of light-wood, while Bob started a fire and placed a kettle of water upon it.

By the time their provisions and bedding were under cover, the water was boiling and Bob made the coffee, while George unpacked one of the baskets and spread its contents upon a snow-white napkin in front of the tent. He said he wasn't hungry; but his actions told a different story, and so did Bob's.

"Now, then," said the latter, when the last sandwich had disappeared and the coffee pot had been squeezed dry, "we'll clear away the wreck and take a survey of that geyser."

"I believe I am as close to it now as I care to be," replied George. "The old thing might boil over on us."

Bob laughed, heartily.

"There's no danger," said he. "We have a whole hour in which to make our observations. Since we are here and can't get away to-day, let's see everything that we can that is worth looking at."

George lent willing and effective aid in "clearing away the wreck;" but it was with a good deal of reluctance that he shouldered his gun and followed Bob through the mesquite bushes toward the geyser.

He stopped when he reached the ridge, but Bob fearlessly made his way to the top and looked over it.

"Great Scott!" were the first words that escaped his lips. "Come up here, George. This mound is a silicious deposit, which has been thrown up by the spring, and it is as solid as rock."

"It ought to be," replied George, "for it is flint."

"Then what are you afraid of?"

Bob's companion would have found it hard work to answer this question, for he did not know just what he was afraid of.

Laying his rifle on the ground, he climbed to the summit of the ridge, and saw below him an extensive, oval-shaped basin, partly filled with water, which was so clear that the smallest pebbles on the bottom could be plainly seen.

Its surface was as smooth as a mirror, and there was nothing in or about the basin to tell of the terrible commotion that had taken place there a short time before.

"This bangs the great geyser of Iceland," said Bob. "That famous spring, in its calm periods, appears to be a circular basin about seventy-two feet in diameter and four feet deep; but this one is two or three hundred feet wide, and the water must be twenty feet deep. Do you see those little holes, about a foot in diameter, that are scattered all over the bottom? There is where the stream comes from that raises these round-topped waves, while the power that threw that huge column of water so high in the air must have come from somewhere over there," added Bob, jerking a piece of flint as far as he could toward the centre of the basin. "I wish I had pluck enough to put my skiff in here and take a better look at it."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed George, backing down the mound. "If you do that, you will have to go alone."

"Why, such things have been done," said

THE GEYSER HOLE.

Bob. "The shaft of that Iceland geyser has been measured, and found to be nine feet in diameter and seventy feet deep."

Bob took another long look at the yawning gulf below him, and then crawled down the ridge and joined his companion. He picked up his gun, and was about to say something more to him, when he noticed that one of the setters had come to a point, and that the other was backing him beautifully.

"A flock of quails for a dollar!" said Bob. "Now look sharp. It is almost impossible to flush them, and so you will have to shoot them running."

As Bob ceased speaking, his gun spoke twice in rapid succession. No birds arose at the reports, but a couple of mule deer, which had been enjoying their mid-day nap in a thicket not more than twenty yards away, broke cover, and set off toward the farther end of the valley at the top of their speed.

"Don't shoot!" cried Bob, as George's light double-barrel arose to his shoulder. "You'll only wound them, and, besides, we want them to show us the way out."

CHAPTER XXX.

IN THE MOUNTAINS.

"SEEK dead!" commanded Bob; whereupon the setters began beating the bushes to find the two birds that had fallen to their master's gun.

"Didn't I tell you that there were wild animals in this valley? The presence of those black-tails proves that there must be some way of communication with the outer world, and if we are smart enough to find it, we are all right."

"They have found another flock," said George, who was closely watching the movements of the setters.

"They are pointing the dead birds now," was the reply. "Fetch!"

In obedience to this command, each of the dogs seized a bird and deposited it in Bob's outstretched hand.

"Some folks call them Gambel's partridges," said the latter, as he handed one of the birds to George for examination; "but those who are better posted in natural history call them Arizona quails. Now, you carry the guns, and I will look out for the dogs."

So saying, Bob drew a couple of light chains from his game-bag, and, after fastening them to the collars the setters wore around their necks, he led them to the thicket in which the deer had been concealed, and put them on the trail.

The intelligent animals, which seemed to know just what was expected of them, took it up readily, and would have followed it at a keen run if they had not been held in check by the chains. They did not give tongue, but kept at their work in silence, and at the end of two hours brought the boys to the mouth of a densely-wooded ravine which ran back into the mountains.

During this time the geyser had been at work again, its approaching period of activity being heralded by the quaking of the ground and the same terrific explosion that

had frightened them so badly three hours before.

The boys could not see it as plainly as they did before, because they were much further away from it, and there were too many bushes in the way; but they had a better view of the column that shot up from the basin, and they saw that, instead of being round like a hogshead, it was very broad and flat. When it crumbled to pieces and fell back into the basin, the sight was grand and awe-inspiring.

"What's that?" asked George, suddenly facing about and looking toward the ravine.

"That was the echo," replied Bob, "and it is probably what we heard while we were at home. Of course, I am not positive on that point, and I don't suppose it will be settled until some scientific men have been here to look into the matter. That shaft in the middle of the basin must be a frightful place to look at," added Bob, at the same time telling himself that he had half a mind to say that he would not leave the valley until he had paddled over that same shaft and dropped a line into it to see how deep it was.

Bob was an enthusiast, and if he had had a companion who was at all like himself, he would have known more about that geyser before he left it.

He was formed of the same sort of material that those daring travelers and explorers who have done so much to add to the knowledge of the world are made of.

He would have been one of the first to climb the Matterhorn without a guide; to enter a newly-discovered cave; to go up in a balloon or down into a coal mine; to plunge into the depths of some unknown wilderness —in short, he was ready to undertake almost anything that was exciting or dangerous, but he wanted backing.

"Now I will mark this ravine so that we can find it again, and, bright and early to-morrow morning, we will begin our homeward journey," said Bob, adding, when he saw the look of delight on George's face, "Don't shout until you are out of the woods, old fellow. We have a long and tedious journey before us; but you can't realize the difficulties of it, because you have never lived

among the mountains. This ravine looks as though it might take us somewhere, but it may lead us slap into a pocket."

"What's a pocket?" asked George.

"It's a place in the mountains that you can't get out of except by the way you came in. If this valley was walled in as solidly as we thought it was, it would be a pocket, and a bad one, too; for we could not possibly get out of it."

Bob then went on to explain that a mountain stream is like a tree pressed flat, the only difference being that the branches do not cross one another. The tributaries are the branches, each one being a perfect tree in itself and leading to the parent stem.

It was perfectly safe, he said, for a tenderfoot to leave his camp alone and hunt *up* stream, so long as he did not cross any of the "divides" he found in his way; but if he went *down* the stream, the chances were that he would get lost when he tried to find his way back, for he would be almost sure to turn up one of the tributaries instead of following the main current. If he crossed a "divide," and got into another system of

ravine, he might wander about for weeks, and starve to death at last.

While Bob was speaking, he took the chains off the dogs, and marked the ravine by breaking a branch off an evergreen and leaving it hanging by the bark.

Then he and George went back to camp shooting three quails on the way, which, added to the two Bob had in his game-bag, made an excellent supper for them.

They sought their blankets at dark and enjoyed a good night's rest, in spite of the fact that the geyser awoke them regularly every three hours by the discharges of its subterranean artillery.

After they had eaten breakfast, which was served up at daylight, Bob, who had bestowed no little thought upon the matter, proceeded to select the articles they were to take with them on their journey.

He filled his double cartridge-belt with ball and shot cases; saw that George's powder-horn and bullet-pouch were well supplied, and put into his game-bag all their lines and hooks.

As much of their provisions as they could

conveniently wrap up in their blankets were next laid aside; but these bundles were made very light, for Bob knew that before they had spent two days among the ravines, the weight of their packs would begin to tell upon their progress.

The next thing was to take care of the numerous articles they were compelled to leave behind them. They might not succeed in working their way out the first time trying, and if they were obliged to return to the valley to take a rest and make a new start, they wanted some supplies to fall back on.

The rest of the provisions were wrapped up in a blanket and hoisted into the branches of a sapling; the tent was taken down and concealed in a thicket where it would be somewhat protected from the elements; the skiff which had carried them safely through the canyon was hauled out on the bank and turned bottom up, and the little fowling-piece and the ammunition-box which contained the rest of their cartridges were wrapped in a rubber poncho with their fishing-rod, and hidden under a log.

When all this work had been done, Bob fastened the coffee-pot to his belt, tied the stump of his oar to his pack, and led the way toward the ravine, the geyser favoring them with one of its grandest eruptions by way of a "send off."

It would take a story longer than this to describe all the incidents of the journey that was begun that morning, and which continued for three long, weary weeks.

Such trials and privations, such severe tests of their endurance and fortitude, they had never known before.

Bob was experienced in mountain travel, and he knew as much, in a general way, regarding ravines and "divides" as the men with whom he had hunted could tell him; but he often found himself at fault.

After stumbling over rocks and logs all day long, it was certainly discouraging to find themselves in a "pocket" at night—to ascertain that the stream they had been following had its source in a little glen which was hemmed in on all sides by rocks so precipitous that a big-horn could not have scaled them.

Bob traveled entirely by the sun, and

tried hard to keep the points of the compass in his mind; but when George began to affirm with vehemence that was not natural to him that the sun had fallen into a habit of rising in the north, he lost faith in himself, and his courage all left him.

For a while, George bore up manfully. He was cheerful and confident, and ready to follow as long as Bob was willing to lead; but when the last morsel of their provisions was gone, and they saw their supply of ammunition growing smaller, and they were obliged to go supperless to bed, in spite of all their efforts to secure some of the mountain sheep that occasionally showed themselves on the cliffs far above their heads, and their boots and clothing began to show unmistakable signs of the rough treatment they were receiving, and the ravines all the while grew darker and gloomier, and the "pockets" became more numerous—then things began to look serious indeed, and George to show the first symptoms of what frontiersmen call "plains insanity"—that is, an uncontrollable desire to "keep moving."

While Bob insisted on deliberation and the exercise of extreme caution, and used his best endeavors to keep his own thoughts and his companion's from dwelling upon their almost hopeless condition, George wanted to rush ahead; he didn't care where he went, so long as he was in motion. He could not bear to sit down for a moment.

These alarming symptoms increased every day, and finally things came to such a pass that Bob could not induce his companion to stop for the night, until he had threatened to tie him hand and foot. It was a necessary precaution, but he neglected it too long. One morning he awoke from a troubled slumber, and started up in his blanket to find that George was missing.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."

BOB became terribly excited and frightened when he found that his companion was gone, for he knew very well what it meant, and what it was likely to lead to. He did not believe that he could follow his trail and overtake him, and even if he did, it was not at all probable that he would be able to manage the insane runaway.

He was experienced enough to know that being lost, or even "turned around," in an unknown wilderness, has an effect upon some minds that is simply appalling. In the language of one who has passed through such an ordeal, and who earnestly prays that he may never be called upon to pass through another:

"Everything seems changed and unnatural.

The most ordinary events appear to possess an unusual significance. The nerves become unstrung, and the man soon loses control of himself entirely. I have been told of two instances where lost men when found and approached by parties sent in search of them, made off in the greatest terror, escaping by almost superhuman efforts from their friends, to die of starvation in the mountains."

It was no wonder that Bob became alarmed when he thought of these things, or that it was only by a great effort of will that he kept control of his own mind.

"Poor George is as crazy as a loon," cried Bob, jumping to his feet, and bundling up both the blankets, preparatory to setting out in pursuit of his friend. "I haven't any too much sense myself, but I'll not desert him so long as I have the strength to follow his trail. Here, fellows," he added, holding out to each of the setters in turn the boots that George had left behind in his hurried flight. "Take a sniff at these, and then hunt him up."

As Bob said this he ran his hand along the ground, and waved it toward the "divide" in

front of him. He knew his friend had gone that way, for he could see the prints of his feet in the soft earth. He hardly expected that the dogs would obey him, for they had never been called upon to do such a thing before. Besides, the faithful animals had been but scantily fed during the last few days, and they were in no condition for work. But they took up the trail, nevertheless, and followed it straight to the "divide," up which they scrambled as rapidly as their strength would permit, Bob keeping close at their heels.

When he reached the top he was all out of breath, and had to stop and sit down; but the dogs began the descent at once, and soon were out of sight in the bushes. Five minutes later they gave tongue joyously, and their loud yelps were mingled with another sound, which made Bob tremble, and wonder if his own mind were not wandering. It was a human voice. He was sure of it; but yet he could not make himself believe that he was not mistaken, for it sounded so strange and unreal. He could not catch the first words it

uttered, but presently he heard it say, in strong, cheery tones:

"Them must be his huntin' dogs. Poor things, they look to be pretty nigh tuckered out. Let's put 'em into the wagon with their master."

"Who-whoop!" shouted Bob.

He put all his remaining strength into that shout, but his voice was as weak as his body, and he hardly expected that it would reach the ears of the men below him. It did, however, and, after a moment or two of silence and suspense, an answering shout came back to him.

"Hold on a minute, please!" cried Bob. "I need assistance!"

He staggered to his feet and stumbled down the "divide." It seemed to him that he never would reach the bottom—at least, alive, for now and then his strength would all leave him, and he would go rolling down the steep declivity, until he was stopped by some log, rock or thicket of bushes. It was in this way that he made his appearance among the men who were waiting for him— falling headlong

through the willows that lined the base of the hill, and landing in the road all in a heap. They hastened to pick him up; but when they had taken one look at his face, they dropped him as if he had been a coal of fire.

"It's Bob Howard!" gasped one.

"Or his ghost," said another.

"I am no ghost, boys," was the faint reply. "I am Bob Howard—or all there is left of him. I went down Lost River Canyon ever so long ago, and I have just got out."

The men waited to hear no more. They rushed forward in a body to help him—there were a dozen of them in all—and while one took his gun, to which he had held fast in spite of his hurried descent of the hill, and another put a canteen of water to his lips, Bob looked around and saw that he was among friends. He had stumbled upon a party of Mr. Evans' teamsters, and he knew every one of them.

"My king!" exclaimed the grizzly old mule-driver, pulling off his hat, and drawing his shirt sleeve across his forehead. "This beats my time all holler! It is Bob Howard,

ain't it? An' he ain't all smashed to pieces, nuther, like we thought he was. I say, Bob," he added, nodding his head toward one of the wagons, "is that crazy feller we lassoed just now the boy who went into the canyon with you?"

"Don't make him talk," said the wagon-master. "Hold him up, some of you, while I fix a place for him."

The wagon-master worked with a will, and in a few minutes strong hands raised the exhausted boy tenderly from the ground and placed him upon a comfortable bed.

When this happened it was broad daylight, but when Bob came to himself again it was pitch dark. He had slept all day. At first he did not know where he was, but after he had gotten his wits together he became aware that the light of a camp-fire was shining through the canvas cover of the wagon, and that the odor of boiling coffee filled the air.

After a few attempts to get upon his hands and knees, he managed to crawl to the forward end of the wagon and look out. The

teamsters were seated around a cheerful blaze, eating supper.

"Any of that coffee for me?" asked Bob.

The men made no reply in words. Two of them arose to their feet, helped Bob out of the wagon, and to a seat by the fire, and a quart cup, filled to the brim with the refreshing beverage, was placed in his hands.

"That makes me feel better," said Bob, after he had taken a long and hearty drink.

"Well, then, if you're all right, mebbe you can tell us something about that canyon?" suggested the wagon-master.

"Did you see the giant?" asked several of the men, in concert.

"No, I didn't see the giant; but I know what it is that makes that noise we hear so regularly," replied Bob. "It is the echo, awakened by the eruptions of the biggest hot spring I ever saw or heard of. But, before I tell my story, I want to ask you a question. Didn't you say something about a crazy fellow this morning?"

"I should say so!" exclaimed the wagon-master. "Me an' the boys was drivin' along

the road, thinkin' of nothing, when, all to onct, a chap, with ragged clothes an' streamin' hair, come rushin' out of the willows. He tuk just one look at us, an' then he streaked it acrost the plains, as if all the wolves of Arizony was clost to his heels. In course we didn't know who he was, but we seed in a minute what was the matter of him. Some of the boys who think themselves jist a trifle swifter nor lightnin', tuk arter him on foot, but they might jist as well have tried to catch the wind. The feller run like a deer. Then four of us tuk a mule apiece outen the harness, an' lit out arter him, and finally Jaspar thar tripped him up with a lariat. But he fit like a tiger, an' it tuk all four of us to hold him."

"Where is he now?" inquired Bob.

"In that wagon, fast asleep."

"You don't think that anything serious will come of it, do you?"

"That's hard to tell. While I was post-hunter at Camp Clark, I was sent out with a party to look for a soldier who had got lost. When we found him he tuk to a tree, an' it

was all we could do to git him down ag'in. We tuk him to the post, but he must have left some of his brains somewhar in the mesquite bushes; leastwise, he never had a level head on his shoulders arterward, an' he was discharged from the service fur disability. But we'll do the best we know how fur this friend of your'n, an' if anybody kin bring him around all right, I reckon Mr. Evans is the man. Now, Bob, fire away!"

There was no need that the boy should indulge in flights of fancy to in order to make his auditors understand that he and George Edwards had had an exceedingly hard time of it, but he could not help growing eloquent when he told of their voyage through the dark canyon and described the geyser and its eruptions.

"I marked every ravine we passed through," said he, in conclusion, "and some day I am going to take an exploring party back there. But first I am going to make the country about here warm for somebody. By-the-way, I brought a piece of an oar down the hill with me. Have any of you seen it?"

"We tuk keer on it," said the wagon-master, while all his companions scowled and looked very savage indeed. "Do you know who sawed that thar oar? It was Sam. He done it kase you wouldn't give him a job, an' your cousin knowed he was goin' to do it, an' he never said a word."

It was now Bob's turn to be astonished, but before he could speak the wagon-master began and told his story, winding up with the words:

"They wanted Mr. Evans to take 'em to the railroad station to onct, so that they could go back East, but the ole man wasn't fool enough to do it. He said that if Arthur reckoned he could come here to Arizony an' cut up sich shines as them an' git off scot-free, he had made a big mistake; so he tuk 'em to Camp Clark an' give 'em up to the United States Marshal. I tell yer, they had to run for it. They hadn't more'n got inside the lines afore the boys came scootin' down arter 'em. If the post had been five miles further off, the soldiers couldn't have saved 'em."

It was late before any one in that camp thought of his blanket. There was much to talk about, a thousand and one questions to be asked and answered, and it was midnight before the wagon-master told Bob that he had better go back to bed.

Before he went, he took a look at George; but, as the latter was slumbering peacefully, he did not disturb him.

When they reached Mr. Evans' ranch, two days later, the scenes we have just described were re-enacted. The same surprise and joy were expressed over their unexpected return, the same stories were told on both sides, and the same questions asked and answered.

George had by this time so far recovered that he was able to sit up and put in a word now and then, to help Bob on with his narrative; but he was very nervous, easily frightened, and so Mr. Evans put him to bed and left him there under his wife's care, while he and Bob rode down to the valley.

We shall not attempt to describe the meeting between Bob and his herdsmen, for we could not do justice to it. They were fright-

ened at first, and some of them were more than half inclined to take to their heels at the sight of him; but when they found that it was really Bob, and not his ghost, who had come back to them, they broke out into the wildest kind of Indian yells, and made the most extravagant demonstrations of delight.

Affairs moved smoothly at the ranch after that.

Bob refused to appear against his cousin, and so did Ike, who did it simply because he knew his young employer desired it. Consequently, Arthur was discharged from custody, and he and his father made all haste to shake the dust of that Western country from off their feet. Bob does not know where they are now.

George Edwards did not leave any of his brains behind him in the mesquite bushes. He gained health and strength rapidly under Mrs. Evans' skillful nursing, and he is to-day as good a boy, both physically and mentally, as he ever was.

Bob expects, next summer, to act as guide to a party of scientific men, who have ex-

pressed a desire to have a look at that geyser. We should like much to accompany them, for they will be sure to hear some thrilling stories of that wonderful ride in the dark, which resulted in solving *the Mystery of Lost River Canyon.*

THE END.

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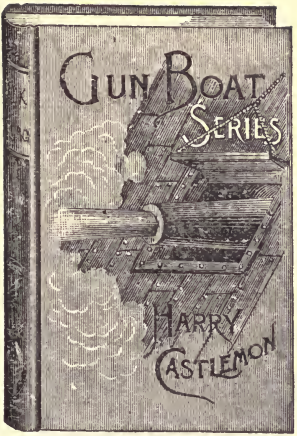

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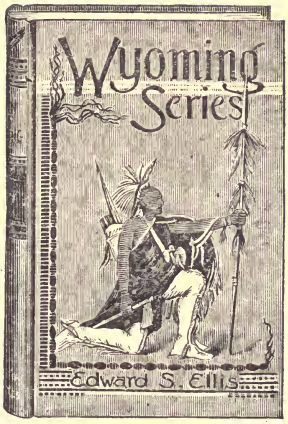

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